Ida Huberman

Living Symbols

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Symbols in Jewish Art and Tradition

Massada

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Dedicated to the memory of my
parents Masha and Meir Salit and my
grandfather Rabbi E. Y. Levine
who was a victim of the Holocaust

Contents

Introduction: Professor Moshe Barash 9

Foreword 11

1. *Symbols as Human Expression* 13

2. *The Creation and the Creator* 17
   The Zodiac 19
   Animals 24
   The Tree of Life 31
   The Conch 34
   The Crown 36
   The Letters of the Hebrew Alphabet 38

3. *Exile and Redemption* 41
   The Architectonic and the Liturgical Become Symbols 43
   The Torah as an Existential Entity and a Symbol 46
   The *Menorah* 49
   Natural Motifs as Messianic Symbols 52
   The Ram's Horn, the Horn and the Unicorn 59

4. *The Search for Means of Identification* 63
   The Tablets of the Covenant 65
   The Star of David 68
   Collective and Individual Symbols 70

5. *A Meeting of Cultures* 73

6. *Symbolism in the Synagogue* 77
   The Mosaic Floor of the Bet Alpha Synagogue as a Symbolic Configuration 77
   The Painted Ceiling of the Hodorov Synagogue and its Symbolism 81
   Three Torah Crowns and their Symbols 86

List of Plates 89

Select Bibliography 94

Plates 95

Introduction

It stands to reason that in attempting to characterize our age, the historian of the future will take note of the attention given to myth as a creative force, capable of manifesting itself in a variety of complex cultural patterns, albeit in different shapes and guises. *Living Symbols* highlights this quality of myth in one particular area, namely the art which developed around Jewish ritual observance.

While concentrating on the central images which evolved in the religious life of the Jewish communities, the author points out the affinity of these images to other civilizations, mostly ancient ones, as well as their singular development in Jewish culture and history. Myth is seen here as a creative force, capable of generating images. It is incorporated into clearly outlined cultural patterns, and yet these patterns do not constrain it.

This unique book examines the way acknowledged universal truth is revealed through symbols, which often go almost unnoticed. In these symbols the power of myth is shown in all its brightness and vitality.

Professor Moshe Barash
Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Foreword

Referring to the legends he used to tell, Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav said: "It would be better not to discover in them any hint of what they actually represent. For one can better use them so long as this remains concealed." The same holds true of the visual symbols which are the subject of this book, if not for the time and distance that separates us from them. In generations past, when these symbols were created out of a shared cultural and religious background, their effect on the Jewish people was unmistakable.

Each period has its art, its symbols and its mysteries. Modern man finds it difficult, if not impossible, to grasp and feel the power of symbols conceived in days gone by, under circumstances so different from his own. Yet, the vitality of certain symbols and their uninterrupted link with the present leave no doubt about the vitality of the civilization which created them and underscore the bond with that civilization's spiritual wellsprings.

Jewish art was essentially a folk art. It is not the outcome of any doctrine, nor is it subject to didactic approaches dictated by theology. It is an art which grew "from the bottom up," as a reflection of the popular attitudes towards the Jewish faith and way of thinking. The visual symbols used in Jewish art were influenced by the mystical tendencies among ordinary Jews and were adopted by the Jewish communities as motifs which drew upon the "understanding of the heart" and did not always yield to rational definition.

To better appreciate the meanings behind these symbols, it is necessary to understand the background against which they came into being. This study examines the spiritual atmosphere in which they evolved and excerpts from canonical Jewish sources, which were widely disseminated.

The book is divided into two parts. The first presents the main text, introducing the reader to the problems posed by Jewish visual symbolism, with references to the plates illustrating the text itself. The second part, the plates, consists of the illustrations coupled with explanations,

grouped neither by subject nor by chronological order, but rather in an arrangement which highlights interrelationships among the different motifs in a single illustration, in different illustrations or even in different periods.
The illustrations are accompanied by passages from the canonic sources of Judaism. These are not the direct source of the illustration but bear some relation to it by virtue of the attitudes or beliefs which they have in common.
Some understanding, however limited, of the variety and richness of Jewish symbolism may well afford greater appreciation of the very core of the culture in which it originated.
I wish to express my deep thanks to my teacher Prof. M. Barash. I also wish to thank all those who helped me in bringing this book to completion, by providing advice, obtaining information and preparing photographs. I am grateful to the Israel Museum and its Photographic Service, to the Beth Hatefutsoth Museum and the workers of its Archives, to the Tel Aviv Museum and its workers, to the photographer Avraham Chai for his photographs of the mosaic floors, and to Benjamin Zarnitzky who succeeded, before immigrating to Israel, in recording on film the Jewish tombstones in the Ukraine.

1 *Symbols as Human Expression*

Man needs symbols and creates them. It is a need that arises from the never-ending confrontation between man and his environment, between man and nature, between man as an individual and the infinite universe. Man's incessant effort to grapple with questions which have no clear-cut, unequivocal answer is bound to give rise to reactions based on associations, emotions and suggestiveness — elements which are essential to the symbol. Phenomena which defied rational, clearly-worded explanation bred symbols which were visually compressed and charged with complex meanings.

The symbol evinces emotional responses and arouses the associative imagination. Whenever a society shares the same cultural-spiritual foundations, the symbol becomes a vehicle of collective identification and acts to combine the specific with the collective being. Through the symbol, the individual is able to communicate with his peers on a deeper level. It is a relationship conveyed by allusions which use rhythms, sounds or shapes to draw attention to whatever they have in common. Sounds and shapes, however, which are capable of deeply stirring the member of one culture may have absolutely no effect on someone from a different culture to whom the particular language of symbols means nothing. So long as the symbol does evoke an emotional

reaction, even one that is not based on logical explanation, it is a living symbol, whose power lies in the contexts which give it its meanings.

A study of the art created among different peoples through the ages reveals that symbols, too, may be transmitted from one culture to another.

The transformation and dissemination of a visual symbol depends on the existence of a cultural-spiritual setting prepared to accept it by incorporating it into the system of symbols already existing in the host culture, until it becomes an integral part of that system. In most cases, however, the transformation of a symbol leads to changes of contents and meanings as well, as the symbol is adapted to its new cultural-spiritual environment.

Being rooted in a monotheistic religion, Jewish art is wary of figurative expression and reveals a tendency towards abstract visual symbols.

The development of unique Jewish symbolism was reinforced by the destruction of the Temple and the loss of national independence. The symbols generated against this background spread all the more rapidly thanks to the continual migrations which typified Jewish history. The Jewish lifestyle, with its strict insistence on religious observance, was instrumental in ensuring that the meeting with other cultures would not detract from the uniqueness of Judaism, even when it did adopt certain forms derived from pagan rituals.

While allowing itself to incorporate certain outside influences, Jewish art was also marked by a thread of historical continuity, linking the memory of the collective past with hopes for the future.

Forms which had been functional-ritualistic, such as the *menorah*, the gates to the Temple and various articles used within it, gradually developed into symbols. Even when the shape of certain symbols was influenced by those frequently found in the surrounding culture, they underwent a process of selection, elimination and adaptation in keeping with

Jewish views of the world.

It goes without saying that cultural influences operate in different directions. Christian symbolism originally made use of many Jewish motifs. As Christianity grew stronger, so too did the didactic tendencies of its art. Abstract forms were cast aside as figurative representation gained a more central position.

Jewish symbolism tended to favor symbols with a collective meaning. For example, salvation and redemption — themes which Christian art associated with saving the soul of the individual — took on the dimensions of a national concept and became a central motif in the development of visual symbols. These collective symbols were transmitted from one generation to the next and from one style to another. As the different mystical trends gained a following, the symbols also became popular.

2 *The Creation and the Creator*

The desire to express the vitality of the divinity and to represent its power is common to all religions. It is through plastic art that this desire may be realized, by creating a tangible and spiritual bond with the divine power. This bond satisfies man's deep-seated need to reach out to that which is remote, cosmic, inscrutable and eternal.

The sculpted or painted representations of the deity, to be found in the temples and centers of ritual observance of most religions, are an expression of this need.

Jewish art is marked by an unremitting struggle between the tendency to express religious belief by visual means and the wariness of going against the grain of monotheism. An express ban on creating images, paintings and masks appears in the Bible several times.

Down through the ages, Jewish halakhic scholars have tried to set clear boundaries on what the plastic arts may or may not represent. The attitude of each generation towards reality is what determined the extent to which this ban was applied. It was the struggle between the desire to represent the vitality of the divinity, on the one hand, and the fear of idolatry, on the other, that ultimately led to the creation of symbols.

The Jewish artist turned to the symbol — simple in shape yet rich in allusions and hidden meanings — which would

encourage the viewer to conjure up, by association, ideas which could not be fully realized in a figurative way. Moses Cordovero, one of the leading Kabbalists in sixteenth-century Safed, referred to the ability of the symbolic representation to remain true to its monotheistic origins. He stressed the absolute abstraction of his religious outlook: "Its oneness does not lie in words or in speech but in thought and contemplation, so as not to set limits through language on that which cannot be limited nor to delineate that which cannot be delineated."[1] Jewish visual symbols were not unlike Jewish mysticism as a whole in their apprehensive progress along the thin border between underscoring the divine presence and lapsing into myths which would jeopardize the monotheistic faith. Both the mysticism and the symbols emanated from the same approach — suggestive yet painstakingly cautious.

Generally speaking, the tendency of Jewish art is to focus on details capable of symbolizing the Creation, as proof of the power and might of the Creator. This basic approach drew its inspiration from the Bible. Psalms (104: 16-21) revels over the creation of the world and the divine order that prevails: the heavens, the waters, the land, the plants. They are interdependent and are all subject to the divine will.

"The trees of the Lord are full of sap;
The cedars of Lebanon, which he has planted.
Where the birds make their nests;
As for the stork, the fir-trees are its house.
The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats;
And the rocks for the conies.
He appointed the moon for seasons;
The sun knows its going down.
You make darkness and it is night
Wherein all the beasts of the forest creep forth.

1. M. Cordovero: *Torat ha-Kabalah* (ed. Horodetzki), Jerusalem, 1951, p. 67

The young lions roar after their prey;
And seek their meat from God."[2]

Man's awe and admiration towards God's creatures reinforce his faith in the spirit and doings of the Creator. The Psalmist therefore goes on to say: "O Lord! How manifold are Your Works! In wisdom have You made them all: the earth is full of Your riches."[2]
This attitude was reflected in Jewish thinking through the ages and influenced many works of art, both directly and indirectly. The present chapter examines such motifs as the zodiac, the Tree of Life, various animals, the conch, the crown and the letters of the Hebrew alphabet — representing the marvel of Creation and serving as a reminder of the Creator's omnipotence and his presence on earth. At the same time they also served as a reminder of the neverending yearning for the Temple and Jerusalem, so that their universal symbolism was applied to the concepts of exile and redemption in Jewish tradition.

The Zodiac

Pictorial representations of the zodiac appear on the mosaic floors of fourth to sixth century synagogues in Palestine. Despite the stylistic differences among them, all of these
pl. 7 zodiacs are modeled on the identical geometric pattern and
pl. 9 contain similar figurative details. The pattern includes the twelve zodiacal signs and their names. Helios, the sun-god, appears in the inner and central circles. All of the circles are enclosed by a square, and each of its corners presents one of the seasons in the form of a woman surrounded by the agricultural produce typifying that particular season. These
pl. 12 depictions are clearly identifiable in the ancient synagogues
pl. 8, pl. 9 in Palestine: at Hammath near Tiberias, Bet Alpha, Husifah
pl. 2 and Na'aran. A similar geometric design, also based on circles and squares, appears on the mosaic floor of the

2. Psalms 104:16-24

synagogue at Japhia near Nazareth but does not include the figurative details. *pl. 3*

It seems very surprising to find the zodiac, and especially the sun-god and his chariot, in the main sanctuary of the synagogue. After all, the zodiac is an age-old formal motif derived from the ancient Chaldean civilization. The astronomers of old described it as a heavenly circle representing the motion of the sun around the earth. In a sense, the zodiac was seen as a mathematical structure portraying the activity of the heavenly bodies. Just as the heavens, sun and moon were idolized in pagan civilizations, the zodiacal signs also became the object of idolatrous adulation. *pl. 1*

Jewish philosophy has always been ambivalent towards stars and zodiacal signs. In the Bible two different approaches are mentioned. One regards the stars and planets as an object of idol worship and denounces "them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun and to the moon and to the planets and to all the hosts of heaven."[3] The other approach includes the heavenly bodies and the stars among the marvels of Creation and praises the greatness of the Creator:

"Praise the Lord;
Praise the Lord from the heavens;
Praise him in the heights.
Praise him, all his angels;
Praise him, all his hosts.
Praise him, sun and moon;
Praise him, all stars of light.
Praise him heavens of heavens
And waters that are above the heavens.
Let him praise the name of the Lord;
For he commanded and they were created."[4]

During the period when the mosaic floors were being

3. Kings 2, 23:5
4. Psalms 148:1-5

designed, the influence of pagan religions was on the decline. Thus, the graphic design of the zodiac containing the seasons, stars, sun and moon can be taken as representing the planets, the wonders of the annual cycle and the harmony of the cosmos.

Nevertheless, awe of the cosmic bodies and a tendency to regard them as manifestations of the divine penetrated into Jewish circles as well. While the spiritual leaders managed to prevent any actual deviation from the normative religion, this awe of the cosmic had its effect on individuals and groups within the people. One example of this is the magical work *Sefer ha-Razim (The Book of Secrets)*, attributed to the Talmudic period, alluding to the adulation of heavenly bodies. The writer addresses the "Great Angel Called the Sun" and says, "I worship You, Helios, who rises in the East. Good angel forever faithful, loyal leader, who causes the magnificent wheel to turn. You have fixed the sacred order (of the stars). Master of the poles, brilliant leader, king of the heavenly order."[5]

The Talmudic sages, apparently aware of the influence of prominent symbols in neighboring cultures, emphasized that, "He who sees the sun in its season, the moon in its fullness, the stars in their orbit, the planets in their fixed order, will say, 'Blessed be the Creator of the universe'."[6]

The sages of old had no intention of belittling the greatness and power of the sun, moon, stars or signs. They merely wished to leave no doubt about the supremacy of the one God, as evidenced by the cosmic orders. It was this attitude that made it possible to include the zodiac as a central decoration in the synagogue. Not only didn't the zodiac within the synagogue run counter to the will of the normative religious leadership; it actually served the purposes of that leadership.

pl. 8
pl. 9

The descriptions of the zodiac in Jewish art then stress the

5. *Sefer ha-Razim* (ed. M. Margalioth), Jerusalem, 1967, p. 12-13
6. *Yalkut Shimoni*, Leviticus 23

wholeness of the system and show a tendency towards abstraction. The number twelve runs through the compositional organization of all the mosaics, representing the zodiacal signs, the months of the year and the hours of the day or night. Other associations linked with the zodiac in the context of Jewish philosophy are covered in the chapter dealing with the religious-national implications of this motif.

The inclusion of zodiacs in the synagogue floor mosaics apparently took into account the prominence of astrological beliefs in those days and exploited certain popular artistic motifs. In Jewish art, however, these motifs were subjugated to the overall conception in which the presence and activity of the Almighty is symbolized in abstract indirect terms. The very fact that the motifs were situated on the floor, moreover, was a means of diminishing their sanctity and preventing the development of any cult which worships God's creations instead of God himself.

Medieval Jewish literature included many different portrayals of the planets and the signs. They were likened in turn to the righteous men, the tribes of Israel, the Patriarchs and the ceremonial objects in the Temple. In Kabbalistic mysticism, they symbolized the forces which mediate between abstract Divinity, on the one hand, and the world — and man — on the other. One approach widely held in the Middle Ages linked the heavenly bodies and the temporal cyclicity to the divine concern for man's moral behavior. It was this link that was represented in the popular work of the thirteenth-century Spanish poet and Kabbalist, Isaac ben Sahula:

"O great almighty God, today I have fathomed Your awful teaching, Your words and Your prophetic wisdom, for the wheels turn at the will of the Almighty and the stars have no will of their own to do good or evil. Their motion is filled with purpose and their seasons are set, to be as that simple thing that has shared in the secret of the divine... For

all men must revere Your magnificent deeds, and fear You, almighty God."[7]

Pictures of zodiacal signs were common in medieval illuminated manuscripts, whether as individual signs ornamenting the pages on which the prayers for rain appeared or as a calendar connecting the names of the signs with the months and holidays in a single circle. In eighteenth-century Italy, this motif was widely used as a decoration for marriage contracts. The geometrical design of the zodiac — with the names of the signs and the four corners symbolizing the four winds and the four seasons — also appeared frequently in Kabbalistic scrolls of invocation which were in popular use in the Jewish communities of Europe and the Moslem countries. This design sometimes appeared alongside the Tree of *Sefirot*,[8] the graphic-symbolic representation of the Kabbalists' way of regarding the world.

It was in southeastern Poland of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, however, that the zodiac was discovered anew as a central and prevalent motif — on the painted ceilings of the wooden synagogues.

More than a thousand years elapsed between the zodiacs found on the mosaic floors of the ancient synagogues in Palestine and those of Poland. Nonetheless they share a common factor, namely, the desire to draw inspiration from the divine power to express the perfection of Creation. "Lift up your eyes and see who created all this, for the greatness of the doings prove the greatness of the doer."[9] This is the message in *Kenaf Renanim*, a Jewish homily that was widespread in nineteenth century Poland. The zodiac portrayed on the ceiling of the synagogue in Ḥodorov was

7. Ben Sahula, *Meshal Kadmoni,* 77, Tel-Aviv, 1953
8. Hebrew Kabbalistic term for the ten stages of emanations forming the realm of God's manifestation in his various attributes.
9. Lurie, Hanoch Sondel, *Kenaf Renanim*, Warsaw 1889 (Prologue to "Perek Shirah")

wreathed in many motifs from the worlds of flora and
pl. 60 fauna, which celebrate the wondrous variety of the Creation. In the center of the zodiacal signs is an eagle, associated with heights and reminiscent of the sun-god
pl. 66 depictions in the ancient mosaics.

The Jewish communities were victims of recurrent persecutions and pogroms during the period when the Polish wooden synagogues were being built and decorated with richly symbolical motifs. Their self-confidence and security had been undermined and many of them fell under the sway of messianic leanings. The Kabbalah gained ground, a mystical mood permeated Polish and Eastern European Jewry and folk beliefs about angelic creatures linking God and Creation also gained currency. The power of the symbols was on the rise.

Thus, while careful to refrain from any hint of idolatry or any assimilation of folk traditions, the paintings did contain allusions to the Creator, the presence of the Creator, Divine Providence and the hope of redemption.

Within this system of symbols, the zodiac stirred associations with the heavenly hosts, the flawlessness of Creation as a reflection of the Creator, the angels wavering between the heavenly and the earthly, the Divine Providence, the righteous ones, the tribes of Israel and finally, the Temple which will be dealt with more thoroughly in the Exile and Redemption chapter.

Animals

Ever since the beginnings of human civilization, the animal world has been an important subject in art. Animals were painted on prehistoric caves and on tree-barks in the habitats of remote tribes. They were included in the sculpture and painting of the Africans and in the art of ancient Asiatic and European civilizations. Some of the animals were portrayed in a realistic style representing man's impressions of nature. At other times, the depictions

were more allegorical or metaphorical. In many civilizations, animals' natural characteristics were regarded as supernatural and the artists would try to convey these as well, so that allegories, legends and visual descriptions of animals would relate their traits or shapes to such abstract and cosmic entities as the sun, the stars, the sky, fire, strength, patience, kingliness, stability and spirituality. The struggle among different creatures was taken to symbolize a struggle among conflicting powers, with the victory of one over the other providing a visual representation of the victory of human aspirations. Thus, for instance, the victory of a winged creature in its battle with a wingless one was associated with the victory of spirit over matter, of the transient over the stable. Motifs taken from the animal world have also symbolized the elements of the universe — earth, air and water — and their inclusion in a joint composition represented the harmony of creation.

Jewish art reveals universal elements in its visual representations of animals. Many of the descriptions show animals in pairs, an arrangement that was regarded as one of the basic elements of the universe since the symmetry is said to underline the balance of Creation. Pairs of lions, peacocks, deer or birds facing one another are very common in the decorations of synagogues, the holy ark, paper cuts and ceremonial objects. They appear in various positions, standing, reclining or leaping on either side of a *menorah* or gate, the Tree of Life, a crown or the Tablets. By contrast with the harmonious animal pairs, other animals are depicted in a state of struggle: the predator and its prey or a winged animal and a four-legged one.

pl. 72 *pl. 71* *pl. 81* *pl. 38* *pl. 101* *pl. 39* *pl. 65*

The animal's position in the composition has a bearing on its symbolic meaning in art in general and in Jewish art in particular. The seventeenth-century Ḥodorov synagogue, for example, includes four paintings in which one animal is preying on another in each of the four arched corners of the ceiling. The location of these scenes in the lowest part of the ceiling arches is deliberate. They act as a symbolic contrast

pl. 63 *pl. 64*

to the balance and spiritual elevation represented by the graphic shapes next to them; alongside the animals of prey is
pl. 67 a lion in confrontation with a unicorn on the one side of the
pl. 59 ceiling and a peaceful bear holding the Tree of Life on the other.

The confrontation of the lion and the unicorn is a complex and universal symbol. Many stories in Jewish sources, among others, describe them as two powerful forces, whose struggle creates tension but can be brought into line by a superhuman power. Jewish tradition in fact combines the shape of the unicorn (usually depicted in European art as a
pl. 62 white horse with a long straight horn) and a wild ox (mentioned frequently in the Bible and Talmud as an allusion to the presence of a supernatural power). The combined lion-unicorn motif, then, represents the symbolism linking the earthly with the celestial and the ambivalent forces that tend, on the one hand, to erupt in a surge of powerful impulses and, on the other, to exercise restraint and, with divine inspiration, to create a harmonious balance.

Jewish literary works about animals — especially fables and allegories — were widespread in Europe in the Middle Ages. Among them were *Mishlei Shu'alim* by Berechiah ha-Nakdan and *Meshal ha-Kadmoni* by Isaac ben Sahula, both dating from the thirteenth century. The anonymous Hebrew tract *Perek Shirah* was especially popular and became the subject of many different commentaries and interpretations. This work contained hymnic sayings in praise of the Creator by His creatures. In the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, every sentence was supported by homiletic interpretations which were philosophical, allegorical and didactic in nature and were influenced by Kabbalistic mysticism. Each of the animals described in *Perek Shirah* shares in the cosmic adulation of God. Each form of animal life acquired a rich symbolism incorporating a moral lesson.

Jewish art absorbed the atmosphere and contents of these
 interpretations and it was in this spirit that many of the

animal decorations were made for synagogues and ceremonial objects. The Jewish artist was influenced by the Bible, the Talmud, the Aggadah, the Kabbalah, the Scriptural interpretation and the homilies, on the one hand, and by developments in Christian European art and Moslem civilization, on the other. When it came to adopting shapes and forms favored by the surrounding culture, however, Jewish artists were extremely cautious. One example of the conflict between faithfulness to a Jewish source and wariness of it because it had been tainted by Christian idolatrous influences was the motif of the *Merkavah* (the chariot which bears the Throne of God). "As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man and the face of a lion, on the right side; and they had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle."[10]

Many Jewish homilies were devoted to these verses, among them the following, attributed to Rabbi Avin: "Four sorts of proud creatures have been created into the world: the proudest of creatures — man, the proudest of fowl — the eagle, the proudest of animals — the bull, the proudest of beasts — the lion, and all have assumed kingship and have been granted greatness and all have their rightful place under the Chariot of God Almighty."[11] Yet, despite the symbolic importance of the *Merkavah*, it was rarely included in Jewish art in its entirety. The popularity of this motif in Christian art as a symbol of the four evangelists closest to Jesus deterred Jewish artists from using it, but the lion, the eagle and the bull did often appear as isolated motifs. The first two motifs were especially popular, stemming from the influence of early Middle Eastern civilizations.

The *LION* motif was common in the ancient Middle Eastern civilizations as a battling, fighting and attacking force. In the Bible it is portrayed as a power capable of destroying and punishing but also saving and protecting. Its inherent

10. Ezekiel 1:10
11. *Exodus Rabbah*, 5, 23-24

anger, burning furiously within, was presented alongside the composure and calm it generated once its hunger had been satisfied. The lion's tremendous, supernatural roar was referred to several times in the Bible and gave rise to descriptions and symbolic references that bordered on the divine: "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"[12] This is borne out by the fact that most lions in ancient Jewish art were shown guarding the holy ark or at the entrances to the chapel. Such scenes can be found in the sculpture of the ancient synagogues at Sardis (in Asia Minor), Chorazin and
pl. 74 Bar'am (in Palestine) and in many mosaics dating from the
pl. 12 early Byzantine period.

The writings of the Sages in which lions are cited as the basis for comparison in a moral lesson are moralistic in tone. They often draw an analogy between the lion and the righteous individual, who is the basis upon which the world exists.

pl. 100 Many of the lions in medieval Jewish art are depicted leaping up on either side of the Tree of Life, next to the
pl. 105 crown. During the last two centuries, they are primarily
pl. 103 portrayed carrying the Tablets. This formal arrangement uses the lions as a multifaceted representation of the material reality of the Creation, of the Jewish people adhering to the Torah, and of the spirit and workings of the Creator. The lions are the link between the earthly elements and the infinite, celestial and metaphysical.

In a sense the *EAGLE* is a counterpart of the lion. Just as the lion is commonly regarded in folklore as the king of beasts, the eagle is regarded as the king of birds. In the Bible, an eagle often appears as an allegory to divine protection or as a symbol of heights and security.

In ancient synagogues, engravings of eagles were found over
pl. 78 the doorposts at the entrance. A similar eagle motif had
pl. 79 been popular in Middle Eastern pagan civilizations, where

12. Amos 3:8

the eagle symbolized the sun and the sky. In recent centuries, Jewish artistic compositions depicted the eagle in
pl. 97 a high position, with its wings spread as it towers over the other motifs.

The mystical symbolism of animal motifs, chiefly of the eagle, was especially pronounced on holy arks, Torah
pl. 103 breastplates, painted ceilings, Hanukkah *menorahs* and other objects whose design had become increasingly intricate under the influence of the baroque style. The ceiling of the Ḥodorov synagogue showed the eagle in the center of the zodiac. The eagle, which for centuries had been associated with the sun, fire and sky, was incorporated here into the cosmic view of the zodiac.

This eagle is surrounded by a circle containing the following inscription: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over
pl. 66 her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings."[13] The verse hints to the divine activity embodied by the eagle as a symbol. The Ḥodorov eagle has two heads and a crown. This portrayal is common in European art and heraldry due to Byzantine and oriental influences. In many civilizations, the dualism represented by the eagle's two-headedness stood for the spiritual ambivalence which strikes a balance between good and evil. In the Christian kingdoms it alluded to the duality of the throne: both royalty and divinity. In Jewish culture, the dual shape of the eagle was influenced by the idea of the dualism in Divine Providence, manifested by God's grace and judgment. Divine Providence had been an important element of the eagle symbol in ancient tradition and was influenced in recent centuries by the concept of reward and punishment as functions of man's behavior. The crown above the eagle's heads hints not only to kingliness, Torah and the priesthood but also, to a leaning towards Infinity as an abstract value associated with divine sancity.

In many works of Jewish art, the eagle is portrayed in the

13. Deuteronomy 32:11

pl. 98 upper part of compositions which include other animals as well (such as birds, elephants, deer, storks and hares). It is a position that highlights the eagle's special status in the relationship between God and his creatures.

pl. 85 Of the many animal symbols, it was the *ELEPHANT* as an
pl. 73 artistic motif that evolved over the ages into the image of tranquility, forbearance, wisdom and, above all, endurance — enabling it to bear the burden of life with resignation. This image, symbolically conveyed by a tower and by knights engaged in battle, worked its way into Jewish art and became part of the system of symbols representing the rich variety of Creation.

The symbols of Creation also include many other motifs such as the *STORK*, which the Bible notes for its migrations and its faithful adherence to exact times and seasons. The Sages identified it with the concept of grace. The *DEER* stands for tranquility and is associated with providence in
pl. 70 the Kabbalah. Despite its restless character, the *BEAR* is usually depicted in Jewish art facing forward, with emphasis on its calm and static nature. These traits hint at the messianic symbolism attributed to the bear.

This approach led to the inclusion of animal depictions in monumental works whose formal and stylistic conception was unique in its avoidance of depth, perspective and
pl. 76, 77 isolated details. Instead, very often and in different periods, it led to the development of symbolic arrangements characterized by a "ruglike" integrity. These can be seen on
pl. 74 many of the mosaic floors of fifth — sixth-century Palestinian synagogues, where a wide variety of animals appear among the tendrils of a vine and other motifs, and on the ceilings of Eastern European synagogues, where
pl. 86, 89 symbolic motifs from the world of flora and fauna retain these ruglike arrangements.

This basic approach, with its emphasis on integrity as an all-embracing and multifaceted symbolic expression, incorporating different animals of dissimilar character, also
30 influenced the smaller movable works of Jewish art.

The Tree of Life

The tree was a widespread visual symbol in the ancient Mediterranean civilizations and in the Buddhist, Moslem, Christian and Jewish cultures as well. Because of its organic qualities, the tree was used to represent life, death and resurrection. Very often, it also stood for growth, physical and spiritual development and maternal attributes, manifested in its protectiveness, shade, shelter and nourishing fruit, its capacity for giving life and its tenacity. The tree is also reminiscent of the four seasons and of the lifecycle of man. On occasion, it tied in with the symbolism attributed to water, birds, the stork and the snake as well.

The Tree of Life is a prime example of the synthesis between the universal symbolism ascribed to the tree and the specific influences of Jewish culture. In the Bible, the tree is one of the elements of Creation: "And the earth brought forth grass and herb yielding seed after its kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself after its kind: and God saw that it was good."[14] A great many legends and homiletic interpretations allude to the special symbolism which Jewish tradition assigns to the Tree of Life, apart from whatever universal associations it evokes. The Tree is seen as a symbol of the Torah: "It (wisdom) is a Tree of Life to them that lay hold upon it."[15] There have been many interpretations given to this verse, relating it to other scriptural descriptions of the tree. One view maintains that those who uphold the Torah also uphold the tree which gives life. Other scholars find reference to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, with its promise of eternal life. In the Kabbalah too, the Torah is likened to the Tree of Life. Both are conceived as self-contained and inaccessible.

The idea of a Tree of Life and the way it was envisioned and described in sacred Jewish writings formed a basis for the development of this motif in Jewish, Christian and Moslem art. The frequent botanical motifs on the sides of

14. Genesis 1:12
15. Proverbs 3:18

sarcophagi and ossuaries in Palestine lead us to assume that the plastic depiction of the Tree of Life in Jewish art dates all the way back to the first century. The very appearance of the botanical motif on the sarcophagi and the particular
pl. 4 positions chosen for it (with the tree sometimes being replaced by a sort of column) create a link between the symbolic quality of the tree and the mystical and cosmic connotations surrounding the concept of life and death. The tree, after all, is usually situated in the center of the sarcophagus, serving as both a separation and a link between two round forms. Its base touches the base of the sarcophagus while its top branches border on the upper edge.

pl. 74 In the synagogue decorations of the first centuries C.E., the depictions of trees representing the Tree of Life take on the form of a palm tree. This may in part be due to the influence of the verse, "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree."[16] The symbolic link between the tree and the righteous man is also found in the writings of the Sages: "Just as a date tree which has been uprooted cannot be replaced, so too it is with men of righteousness."[17]

pl. 92 The fifth-century synagogue of Hammam-Lif in northern Africa contains a particularly rich and picturesque example of the link between the palm tree and the symbols of the Garden of Eden. It is a mosaic which forms a very full and detailed depiction of the Creation. The mosaic comprises five parts and is framed on either side by a blend of twigs, animals and fruits, intermeshed in a ruglike fashion. In the center is an inscription flanked by two *menorahs*. The inscription itself forms the dividing line between two scenes which are of special interest in connection with the tree motif. The lower one contains two palm trees separated by two peacocks — usually regarded as the bird of Paradise. Although the mosaic has been partly destroyed, one can still discern above the inscription a circle, with its allusions of

16. Psalms 92:13
17. *Numbers Rabbah*, 3

cosmic imagery. Above this is a graphic shape which might be associated with the hand of God, and a large fish which may well be regarded as a leviathan, especially in light of its proximity to the head of a legendary bull (*Shor ha-Bar*) holding a flower in its mouth. The other parts of the legendary bull have been destroyed, but were undoubtedly connected with the legend in which the bull and the leviathan would be the food of righteous men in messianic times. There is no reason to doubt that the palm trees on this mosaic floor served as symbols of the Tree of Life and of the Tree of Knowledge. This description, with its emphasis on life on earth and its abundance, coupled with the mystical and messianic symbols, elevates the Tree of Life to the status of a manifold symbol, embracing present and future, earthly and heavenly, worldly and imaginary, and enhancing man's belief in the Creator of all worlds.

The symbolic quality of the Tree of Life gradually grew deeper and broader under the influence of Kabbalistic mysticism. The tree is among the central motifs in Kabbalistic symbolism. As the Tree of Life, it ties in with the cosmic portrayal of the Kabbalistic *Sefirot* and the symbolic role of the righteous man. The tree, described initially as planted by the Almighty, evolved in the Kabbalistic *Sefirot* into part of the image of God and a vehicle through which the Godly powers flow into Creation. "It is I who have planted this tree that all the world may delight in it, and with it I have spanned the All and therefrom do the souls rise up joyously."[18]

pl. 29
pl. 37

As a result of the expansion and growing abstraction of the symbolic meanings attributed to the tree, its artistic depiction grew less and less defined in shape. Thus, while the Tree of Life in ancient times had been represented by a palm-tree or vine or olive tree, as of the sixteenth century any form reminiscent of plant growth, organic unity and continuity was considered appropriate for symbolizing the

pl. 90
pl. 101

18. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, 22

concepts associated with the Tree of Life. The colorful, flower-laden tree on the painted wooden ceilings of the Polish synagogues recalls the influences of Slavic folklore. Gilded, plantlike shapes on the holy arks in Italian synagogues were modeled on the convoluted forms of the Italian Baroque. In most cases, these symbolic trees were bound up with the shapes of columns and gateways. The Tree of Life also became a central motif in the paper cuts and gravestone reliefs. Quite often, especially in Eastern Europe, their shape was a somewhat metaphoric merging of plant and *menorah*. The freedom given in the choice of design for the Tree of Life allowed a wide variety of combinations, such as a tree combined with a *menorah* or with a running stream. Other combinations centered on a plant motif alongside images of an eagle, a crown, birds, or hands raised in benediction.

pl. 60

pl. 98, 99

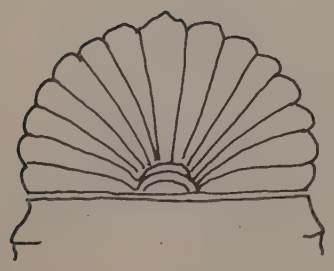
pl. 23

The associations linking the Torah with the organic qualities of the tree were also reinforced: "For the Torah is called a Tree of Life. Just as a tree has its branches and its leaves and its bark and its core and its roots and each of these is called a tree and there is no setting them apart, so it is with the Torah. The Torah too has its inner parts and its outer part but all are Torah. All are the one tree and there is no setting them apart."[19] In the Kabbalah, the unity of the Tree of Life symbolizes control over the Power of Judgment and attests to divine strength.

The proliferation of the Tree of Life motif in Jewish art, then, may be explained by the broad and multifaceted symbolism assigned to it by Jewish mystical thinking.

The Conch

Three motifs competed for the uppermost position in the decorative designs on many holy arks and ceremonial objects in Europe: the eagle with outspread wings, the conch which



19. *Sefer ha-Rimon*, 26. Based on G. Sholem: *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, p. 49 (Hebrew)

widened from the base upwards and, from the late sixteenth century, the crown.

The conch was a very common motif in the art and architecture of the Hellenistic civilizations and was adopted by Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In Greek mythology, the conch is associated with the birth of the goddess of love, Aphrodite, from the waves of the sea. Its shape evokes an image of protectiveness and security. In pagan shrines, it had been common as a decorative motif in the upper sections of the stone niches containing statues of the gods. It was because of this position, then, that the conch came to be regarded as sacred.

Monotheistic cultures soon adopted the conch motif as well, having observed its use as an architectonic element. In
pl. 46 Jewish art, it served as an abstract element with symbolic
pl. 49 overtones of sanctity. In the synagogues of the Galilee in the first centuries C.E., the conch was incorporated into the embellishments on the facade facing Jerusalem. Large conches sculpted in basalt appear, for example, in the third-century synagogue at Chorazin, to the north of the Sea of Galilee.

Its position at the top of the niche which served as an ark
pl. 21 (e.g., in the third-century Dura Europos synagogue in Asia
pl. 50 Minor) stressed the spiritual meanings given to the conch in
pl. 54 Jewish tradition. From this position, it served to protect the Torah and to bestow a feeling of security on behalf of the invisible almighty power.

In early Christian art, the conch appeared in the upper section of the niches used for figures of emperors or Christian saints — a direct continuation of the pagan Hellenistic art. Jewish art tread the narrow line between the desire to give visual form to the divine and the wariness of any physical, figurative descriptions. It incorporated the conch motif in central and sensitive parts of the synagogue, on ceremonial objects associated with the Torah (such as
pl. 44 breastplates, Torah covers, curtains for the holy ark) and on
 articles designed for holiday use.

The conch, then, came to stand for protection, security and a link between the earthly-existential and the heavenly-mystical. Because of the many instances of conches on ancient sarcophagi, its shape also came to be associated with
pl. 49 the passage from this world to the next. The myths which associate it with birth also caused it to be thematically bound to the concept of resurrection.

The Crown

While the word *crown* figures prominently in medieval Jewish literature, it was not before the late sixteenth century that it assumed an independent role as a symbol in Jewish art. The crown that has become a central motif in this art during recent centuries is similar in form to the
pl. 103 crowns of the kings of Europe. It is extremely common on
pl. 43 ceremonial objects related to the Torah scroll and is often portrayed as being borne by lions or hovering over them in the upper section of the embroidered curtains for the holy ark, or of the symbolic compositions on breastplates and holy arks in synagogues. The most common of all are the
pl. 106 three-dimensional Torah crowns, usually made of precious
pl. 107 metals, sometimes decorated with semi-precious and precious stones. Torah crowns of this type were used primarily in Central and Eastern Europe beginning in the seventeenth century.

The three-dimensional crown, designed to draw attention to the loftiness of the Torah and to crown it both physically and spiritually, includes a variety of formal designs of special symbolic significance, related to the values of the Torah itself. Many of these design compositions from the seventeenth century were influenced by the baroque style. Some of them are arranged in layers, with organic transitions from one shape to the next and strict attention to the harmonious integrity of the whole. The structures merge upwards into one another, giving the compositions a feeling of ascent from heavier elements near the base to lighter,

airier ones at the top. The most common of the many formal
pl. 97 and symbolic motifs in these layers are the eagle, the lion,
pl. 107 the zodiac and botanical motifs such as the Tree of Life. The
pl. 106 composition sometimes ends at the top with a bird next to a stream of running water. The decorative composition on the three-dimensional crowns also includes additional crowns which divide the design into registers.

The use of these decorative designs is undoubtedly based on more than merely aesthetic considerations or the desire to glorify the Torah. The expression "crown of Torah, crown of priesthood and crown of royalty," which sometimes appears alongside the visually portrayed crowns, hints at the deeper and broader symbolism of the crown motif. Rabbinic literature linked the crown to the Divine Presence. The verse, "When the crown arrives, all of the soldiers above shudder and roar like a lion,"[20] evokes associations of Godly power. In the Kabbalah, the crown stands for the first *Sefirah*. Scholars of the Kabbalah disagree on the meaning of this *Sefirah*. Some believe it headed the system of *Sefirot* and approached infinity. Others regard it as infinity itself, devoid of any element of activity. According to this view, the first *Sefirah* is the One, the Eternal, "which was, is and will be." The system of mystical *Hitnozezuyot* (sparks of light) mentioned in the Kabbalah sees wisdom as coming from the crown.

From the sixteenth century, Kabbalistic literature has made extensive use of the Tree of *Sefirot*, symbolizing divine
pl. 29 activity, as a graphic device. Graphic depictions of the Tree of *Sefirot* became one of the fundamental components of practical and popular Kabbalism. Likened to the Tree of the World and the Tree of Life, which generate the divine powers needed by Creation, the roots of the Tree are planted in the uppermost *Sefirah*, which is the crown.

It appears then that the crown accrued heavy symbolism as a result of this status of proximity to the divine, to that which cannot be figuratively portrayed in monotheistic Judaism.

20. *Psikta Rabbati*, Part 1, 20

The diversity of its symbolic associations can be explained by ideas which were influenced by Jewish mysticism and by its attempts to come to terms with the complex relationship between God and His creations.

The Letters of the Hebrew Alphabet

Jewish tradition has always held the letter and the printed word in high esteem. The work of the scribes was considered sacred. Copying a Torah scroll — or, for that matter, the writing of a single letter in the Torah — is the fulfillment of a divine commandment. The Hebrew scribe was admonished to take painstaking care in plying his trade; any deviation was regarded as detracting from the sacred integrity of the Torah. The apprehension and wariness in copying out the letters of the Torah reflect a reverence for the Torah, both as the existential core of Judaism and as a symbol which often took on cosmic dimension. This symbolism attached to the letters themselves. Different Scriptural interpretations and homilies attributed independent properties to the letters and stressed their role in creation. The Kabbalists even regarded the letters as a tool wielded by the Creator: "For when the Holy One, Blessed be He, resolved to create the world, the letters had not yet been given meaning. For two thousand years before He created the world He had looked at them and amused Himself with them, and when He decided to create the world, they all appeared before Him, starting with the last."[21]

pl. 146, 147

This account from the *Zohar*, a major work of Jewish mysticism, goes on to describe how each of the letters appears before the Creator, asking Him to use it as the means of creating the universe. When all is said and done, the second letter, *bet*, is chosen. The opening word in Genesis is *Bereshit*, which begins with a *bet*; the letter *bet*

pl. 144

pl. 145

21. *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, texts from the Book of Splendour arranged and translated into Hebrew by F. Lachover, J. Tishby, vol. I, p. 392

does, in fact, launch the act of Creation.

The special and symbolic status of the letters in Jewish culture affected their use in art. One passage refers to Bezalel, the first Jewish artist mentioned in the Torah: "Bezalel knew how to join together the letters that had been used to create Heaven and earth."[22] Jewish tradition holds that the shrine which Bezalel the artist was commanded to create was a cosmic symbol. According to the mystical school of thought in Judaism, it represents the microcosm. The view that the elements of the harmonious universe are based on the twenty-two Hebrew letters gained a following among Kabbalists during the Middle Ages. The letters came to be regarded as increasingly symbolic and were often shaped like the signs of the zodiac, the months or parts of the body.

Thus, the symbolism attributed to the Hebrew letters worked its way into Jewish art and influenced the way in which the letters were shaped and embellished, as well as their prominence in the different art forms. Two main styles, *Ashkenazi* and *Sephardi*, evolved in the design of the alphabetic characters. These are related to the style of the respective cultures around them and to the writing implement used — the stylus or the quill.

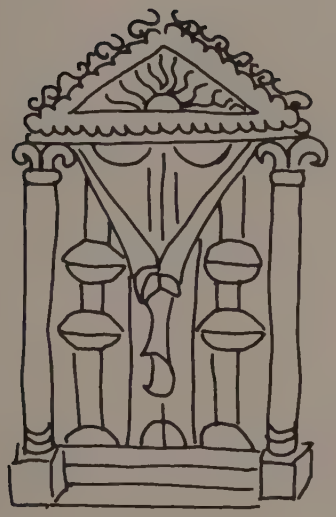
The illuminators of medieval Hebrew manuscripts embellished the letters, sometimes even incorporating animals or botanical motifs within them. The first words in the paragraph were often enlarged and ornamented. The practice of adding elements of flora and fauna to the Hebrew letters was a means of combining the description of God's creatures and the letters which were instrumental in the act of creation. In Jewish art, this combination was manifested in the development of micrographics as well. Micrography involved the use of shapes like cosmic circles, rosettes, lions and, later, human figures in miniature writing, making it possible to strike an organic merger

pl. 57
pl. 58
pl. 115

22. *Jerusalem Talmud*, Yoma 7

between the words and letters and their meanings, on the one hand, and the shapes and symbols, on the other. This type of craftsmanship, which gained ground during the Middle Ages, has survived to the present.

3 *Exile and Redemption*



The Scriptural interpretation (*Midrash*) of Abba Guryon asserts: "Because the Temple was destroyed, the Messiah was born." This saying reflects the growing tendency in Jewish thought to associate the destruction of the Temple with the hope of redemption, which was to become a central motif in Jewish art.

Symbols related to these hopes are common in Jewish art, especially since the period of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. The Temple, its pillars and the vessels within it have all been made into symbols whose significance has grown with the years. They were added to motifs from the world of flora and fauna, in the decoration of the synagogues. The connection between the Destruction and the ensuing hope was also represented by the direction in which the synagogue faced; i.e., both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, the facade and the central entrance of the main synagogues built after the destruction of the Temple were in the direction of Jerusalem. The emphasis on Jerusalem and the Temple may also have been the reason for the association with light. All of which led to a symbolic blend of the light, the direction of worship in the synagogue and Jerusalem.

pl. 21
41

In a rather small synagogue dating from the third century in Dura Europos in northern Syria, a special niche was created for the Torah scroll. It was situated in the western wall of

the prayer-hall, the one which faced Jerusalem. The wall was further highlighted by colorful paintings. The other walls of the prayer-hall were also covered with frescoes but the choice of subjects painted around the niche is evidence of its special symbolic value. The composition attests to the development of a system of symbols relating to the destruction of the Temple, the hopes of redemption and the Torah. This in fact was the spiritual cycle which had characterized Jewish art throughout the ages.

The ancient synagogue in Sardis, in Asia Minor, shaped like a large basilica, also includes signs of arks meant for the Torah scrolls. These were positioned alongside the entrance, next to the wall facing Jerusalem.

The symbolic connection between the direction of Jerusalem, the direction of worship and the location of the Torah scroll became a regular feature in the synagogues of Palestine in the fourth to the sixth centuries. In many of them (Ḥammath Tiberias, Bet Shean, Bet Alpha) the fact that the worshippers faced Jerusalem was also echoed in the motifs chosen for the colorful mosaic floors and in their arrangement within the composition.

pl. 8
pl. 12
pl. 54

The mysticism which evolved in the medieval Kabbalah had a profound influence on the development of messianic symbols connected with the redemption. This was all the more true after the appearance of the *Zohar* in the thirteenth century and especially after the Kabbalah appeared in Safed in the sixteenth century.

The Kabbalists Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria (the *Ari*) and others described visions which used symbols to express feelings and thoughts, and reflected their belief that exile and redemption are interrelated. Jewish art, and that of synagogue decoration in particular, was influenced by this Kabbalistic mysticism and by its symbols, especially in those communities in which historical circumstances had led to a strong tendency towards messianic themes. But the artists, like the Kabbalists themselves, were careful not to go against the grain of monotheism, especially in the

embellishments of Torah scrolls and elements within the prayer-halls.

Throughout its history, Jewish art has made an effort to accommodate two opposing poles: the desire to give visual expression to the mythical concept of exile and redemption and the painstaking avoidance of any express interpretation of symbolic allusions, intentions and feelings. A symbol, whether verbal or visual, is intrinsically multifaceted. Its ability to accommodate different directions tallied well with these two conflicting needs.

The Architectonic and the Liturgical Become Symbols

Such basic architectural forms as the gateway or the pillar are common symbols in the art of many different civilizations and have been a part of Jewish art ever since ancient times. Apart from their obvious architectural function, which led to their use in the facade of the synagogue, they were also an artistic motif in the holy ark containing the Torah scroll and elsewhere. The arks were often designed to resemble gateways, sometimes also including pilasters to support a gable or an arch, and incorporating the conch motif as well. Depictions of gateways and pillars were also found in other art techniques, such as painting, chasing, mosaic, embroidery or smithery, in decorations of synagogues, ceremonial objects, burial sites and illuminated manuscripts. To this very day it is common practice to include the motifs of a gateway and pillars on the title page of Hebrew books.

pl. 45 *pl. 50* *pl. 48* *pl. 49* *pl. 46* *pl. 47*

What was the symbolic meaning assigned to the gateway and pillars which accounted for their popularity in Jewish art? Apparently, the answer lies in the universal traditions dating back to the ancient East and in the specific historical circumstances of the Jewish people.

The ancient arts of the Mediterranean area regarded the simple architectonic form of the gateway as a cosmic symbol representing change. Pagan arts had depicted the

gods returning to earth through gateways, and kings were positioned within them as a sign of their desire for eternal life. Moreover, the gateways themselves and the area above them were embellished with such motifs as the eagle, the signs and round shapes reminiscent of the sun, and other astral bodies. The gateway served as a backdrop for the mystical appearance of figures which were supposed to possess sacred characteristics. It stood for the transition from the real to the unknown, the infinite and the mysterious — which accounts for its use as a background in descriptions of mortals being transformed into immortal, ethereal creatures. By extension, it also came to be associated with the transition from darkness to light and from light to darkness.

In the Temple and synagogues, the transition represented by the gateway stood for the spiritual transition from the secular to the sacred. As an element which allowed the light to penetrate into the building, the gateway also symbolized light. The ark was also regarded as a means of reaching the light of the Torah, its sanctity and its spirituality. By the same token, the title page of a book represented transition — the transition from the tangible to the spiritual, from darkness to light. The engraved gateways and pillars on the

pl. 49 sarcophagi served as a bridge between life and death. In all of these, the gateway was conceived as a symbolic transition, evoking a wide range of associations.

In addition to these symbolic overtones, which were essentially universal, the national historical tradition assigned the gateway and pillars with symbolic functions related to Jerusalem, to the Temple and to the holy ark, in which the Torah scroll was kept.

The earliest known portrayal of the Temple as a gateway

pl. 20 flanked by pillars appears on a coin from the period of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. The pattern on the coin is schematic, abstract and symbolic in nature, and it was this type of pattern which Jewish art was to adopt in the following

 generations. This may possibly be the symbolic pattern

appearing in a painting of the Temple above the niche designed for the Torah scroll in the Dura Europos
pl. 21 synagogue (third century, northern Syria). The niche itself is also shaped like a gateway. It was built into the wall facing Jerusalem in the form of an arch, in which two pillars are crowned with a conch. The gateway, then, is a means of reaching the Torah, but at the same time it is also an opening to hopes of redemption, based on memories of the Temple which was destroyed.

The design of the holy ark has undergone stylistic changes through the ages, under the influence of neighboring civilizations such as the Byzantines, the Goths, the Renaissance, and the Baroque and Neoclassical styles. Nonetheless, certain formal elements, based on the symbolism of the gateway and the pillars, are common to all of them. Other details related to the Temple were also brought into play and, together with the pillars and gateway, served as a symbolic reminder of the Temple, of Jerusalem and of the place reserved for the Torah scrolls in the synagogue — all this in addition to their deeply meaningful role as a cosmic universal symbol.

According to tradition, the two front pillars, called Boaz and Yakhin, of the Temple[23] built by King Solomon were adorned with winding tendrils of golden vines. In other words, the pillars were already regarded as symbolic monuments and as a cosmic element supporting the entire universe. This is attested in the verse, "Who shaketh the
pl. 75 earth out of its place, and the pillars thereof tremble."[24]
pl. 105 They were prominently displayed on holy arks, on curtains of the arks and on other artistic objects and were frequently
pl. 102 embellished with wavy lines and vine tendrils.

The image was further enhanced by the Kabbalistic symbols which evolved during the Middle Ages: "For man does not know, nor does he observe, what it is that the world stands upon and what it is that they stand upon; that when the

23. Kings 1, 7:21
24. Job 9:6

Almighty created the world, he made heavens and fire and water together and they did not solidify. After which they solidified and stood as pillars by virtue of the Supreme Power. After which he placed the world upon the pillars and it is by virtue of that Power that the pillars stood. Whensoever the Power shall disappear so too will the pillars weaken and shake and the world shall quiver."[25] The Kabbalah, then, sees the survival of the world as dependent on the stability of the pillars and on the study of the Torah. It follows that the pillars were bound to become a very common motif in books and artistic objects, and on the decorations of Torah scrolls in particular.

The Torah as an Existential Entity and a Symbol

The Torah played a leading role in the day-to-day existence of the individual and the community. It was a source of knowledge about the proper way of life and an object of study and revery. The Torah linked the here and now, with the spiritual needs it entailed, on the one hand, and the myth surrounding the historical past, the awareness of being in the diaspora and the metaphysical-messianic hopes, on the other. The symbols embellishing the Torah and the holy ark are in keeping with the role of the Torah as a link between these two worlds.

Through the mantle, the crowns and the arks in which they were kept, the Torah scrolls were richly embellished. The *pl. 55* Torah mantles in the Ashkenazi communities were lavishly embroidered and were sometimes also swaddled in a cloth wrapping. In the communities of the Moslem countries, the Torah scroll was kept in a special case, which was often ornately decorated with fabric or with wooden or metal engravings. Another widespread practice, especially in the *pl. 39, pl. 119* European countries, was the use of a Torah breastplate, often made of precious metal and adorned with colorful

25. *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, texts from the Book of Splendour arranged and translated into Hebrew by F. Lachover, J. Tishby, Jerusalem, 1971, vol. I, p. 398

pl. 103 gems. It was frequently devoted to a specific holiday, to which the decorative motifs were thematically related. The two rollers on which the Torah scroll was wound were called Trees of Life and were embellished with silver leaf during the Middle Ages. It was this practice, apparently, that led to the intricate decorations on the finials. In many communities, the finials at the tip of the rollers were designed as a dangling ornament, often lavishly embellished. The designs and symbols used in decorating the Torah were a faithful reflection of the problems surrounding Jewish art. Any motif liable to detract from the abstract and monotheistic nature of the Jewish religion was ruled out, in view of the supreme sanctity of the Torah. The rabbinic sages devoted extensive analyses to the question of what might and might not be included in the decorations of the Torah and the holy ark. This preoccupation involved their awareness of the powerful influence that visual symbols — especially items used in the liturgy — had on the observer. Any motif that might in some way be associated with idolatry was excised, which is why the rabbis were usually, though not always, inclined to prohibit depictions of astral bodies, human images, angels and anything interpretable as representing divine powers.

In those places and periods when mystical movements gained momentum and hopes of redemption took hold of the community, the Torah decorations featured a growing number of symbols having messianic associations. This was true of the Torahs and arks of seventeenth-century Italy and Eastern Europe, where there was a sizable following for the Kabbalah with its emphasis on the symbolic role of the Torah. These Kabbalistic elements were to symbolize the divine spark; the Torah was sometimes likened to the Tree of Life, to light, to a bride and to a crown.

pl. 48 An eighteenth-century wooden ark from the Olkieniki synagogue in Eastern Poland illustrates the plethora of symbols which came into use at the time. The baroque influence, characterized by the joining of many details into a

single organic whole, was reflected on the ark through such motifs as the pillars and gate, the Tree of Life and various animals. Especially prominent was the engraving of a leviathan, standing for the messianic times. A two-headed eagle was featured at the top and three crowns formed the middle: the Torah crown, the crown of priesthood and the crown of kingship. The corresponding symbol appears beside each of these: the Tablets of the Law alongside the Torah crown, the hands of the priest in benediction alongside the crown of priesthood and the eagle alongside the crown of kingship. The two-headed eagle, an engraving patterned on the heraldic royal eagle, alludes to the duality of kingship: the kingdom of David in messianic times and the kingdom of heaven.

The centrality of the study of Torah is allegorically expressed in the different paintings embellishing the wooden synagogues of seventeenth-eighteenth-century Poland. These centered on the firm link between divine mercy and judgment, on the one hand, and expectations of redemption, on the other. Thus, the paintings of bears climbing trees to get at the honey, on the synagogues of the Ukraine, for example, were inspired by local folklore. These might be regarded as an allegorical depiction of the Jew, seeking and finding the sweetness of the Torah. The synagogue in the town of Yablonka, for example, features a silhouette of a bear climbing a tree and the inscription, "Black on white — in memory of the Destruction." One possible interpretation is that the Torah, which is sweet as honey, is inseparable from the tree which the bear is climbing. By regarding the Tree of Life as a symbol and the study of the Torah as an existential value, the community would be helping to hasten the reform of the universe, after which redemption was bound to come. All of this was superimposed against remembrance of the Destruction and awareness of a state of exile.

One of the paintings on the walls and ceiling of the Hodorov Synagogue was of bears climbing a tree, towards a

container of honey at the top. The encircled depiction of an eagle holding a rabbit was flanked by two trees, with three
pl. 68 bears beside each one. The rabbits often served as an allegory for the persecuted Jewish people, whereas the eagle represents the Divine Presence, which may choose to exercise mercy. The bears, standing for the Jewish people inextricably bound up with the Torah, are another element
pl. 69 in the symbolic configuration representing the hastening of redemption.

The symbols adorning the Torah on the outside were an integral part of the synagogue, the ark and the mantle. When the scroll was unrolled, however, for the purpose of the reading, the decorative-symbolic exterior was almost always set aside, and the Torah itself, which was never illuminated, was read with undivided attention to the written word. The contrast between the florid external decorations and the strict avoidance of any embellishment of the text itself was characteristic of Jewish art which was forever trying to reconcile the strict adherence to religious abstraction with the continual infiltration of symbolic motifs whose vitality was anchored in the historical and philosophical concepts of exile and redemption.

The Menorah

During the wanderings of the Children of Israel through the desert, the artisan, Bezalel, the son of Uri, was commanded to fashion a seven-branched candelabrum or *menorah*, for use in the Lord's Tabernacle: "And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold; of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: its shaft, and its branches, its bowls, its knobs, and its flowers, shall be of the same. And six branches shall come out of the side of it; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side; Three bowls made like unto almonds, with a knob and a flower in one branch; and
 three bowls made like almonds in the other branch, with a

knob and a flower; so in the six branches that come out of the candlestick. And in the candlestick shall be four bowls made like unto almonds, with their knobs and their flowers. And there shall be a knob under two branches of the same, according to the six branches that proceed out of the candlestick. Their knobs and their branches shall be of the same; all it shall be one beaten work of pure gold... And the tongs thereof, and the snuff-dishes thereof, shall be of pure gold."[26]

Menorahs, very likely made according to these instructions, once stood in the Temple in Jerusalem. Descriptions of the *menorah*, in all its detail, received extensive symbolic interpretation from antiquity on. The first century Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, excelled in his imagery for the *menorah*. Well-versed in Hellenistic culture, Philo worked into his descriptions symbols which he derived from notions of the cosmos and the universe current in his day. He saw the *menorah* and vessels of the Temple as representing the planets, the cyclic quality of life and the concept of time. The branches of the menorah, according to Philo, could be likened to the celestial bodies. The light in the center represented the sun, while those on either side stood for the remaining planets, three on each side, with their flames facing the center. The emphasis which the Torah placed on making the *menorah* of pure gold, beaten out of one piece, gave rise to various allegorical interpretations, according to which the *menorah* was intended to symbolize the very purest of matter, and hence represented the harmonic perfection of the heavens. The numbers which are stressed in the word-for-word description of the *menorah* — four bowls and seven branches — were viewed as symbolic representations of the seasons of the year and the days of the week. The integrity of the *menorah*, despite its being divided into seven branches has, through the course of time, evoked images of a body comprised of individual limbs or of a tree whose trunk separates into its branches.

26. Exodus 25:31-36 and 38

After the destruction of the Temple, the motif of the *menorah* became an extremely widespread and central figure in Jewish art. The classical scholar, Erwin Goodenough, notes at least 182 examples of seven-branched candelabra among his findings from ancient times along. In the first few centuries after the destruction of the Temple, the form of
pl. 53 the *menorah* was depicted in synagogues on the gates and
pl. 52 portals, and was incorporated in designs on mosaic floors,
pl. 51 clay lamps, glass cups, and bracelets. The form of the *menorah* has also been discovered hewn into rock and stone. It was equally prevalent in Israel and the Diaspora. The *menorah* soon became a simple, often schematic, figure, yet rich in meaning — a symbol which maintained its central position in Jewish tradition for centuries, even until modern times.

It may have been the key position of the menorah in the Temple and the cosmic notions connected with it which moved the Rabbis of the Talmud to forbid making any *menorah* which was identical or even similar to the one that had stood in the Temple. From this prohibition it followed that making two-dimensional seven-branched *menorahs* was permissible, but three-dimensional ones had to have the number of branches altered. Indeed, in Jewish art there are hardly any specimens of three-dimensional seven-branched candelabra. However, seven-branched candelabra have appeared in mosaics, bas-reliefs and paintings, and have been
pl. 55 executed in other two-dimensional techniques such as embroidery, applique, or chasing and embossing.

The *menorah* has symbolized the destroyed Temple, Jerusalem and the hope for redemption so that its cosmic associations tied in with its historical and national symbolism. It became a multifaceted symbol, rich in messianic significance, and any abstract, skeletal drawing of it sufficed to evoke its symbolic associations.

The *menorah* has been portrayed next to the Torah since the ancient times. Such representations became more and more
 common through the Middle Ages. The symbolic images of

the Torah, viewed as light and the divine spark, also shone onto the *menorah*, underscoring its characteristics as a symbol of perfection and harmony.

In recent centuries, we have been witness to ups and downs in the prevalence of the *menorah* as a symbol. During the Emancipation, it even lost its place in synagogues and decorations of the ark. However, in those congregations not touched by the spirit of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation until later, the *menorah* continued to be a focal motif in artistic compositions in synagogue ornamentation, ritual objects, paper cuts and tombstones. A figurative form would sometimes appear on these, evoking associations of the Temple *menorah*, along with associations of the Sabbath candlesticks, of light as an abstract concept or of organic shapes such as the Tree of Life. Such forms can be found in paper cuts, a Jewish branch of folk art found in Eastern Europe and North Africa. Sometimes symbols such as birds or other animals are incorporated next to the figurative shapes. The combined motif, of course, developed into various styles in keeping with the surrounding cultures.

pl. 28

pl. 23

In the nineteenth century, the *menorah* went into eclipse as a key Jewish symbol in Central and Western Europe. However, with the reawakening of Jewish nationalism, the seven-branched menorah reemerged, this time as a Zionist symbol, and since 1948 it has served as the emblem of the State of Israel, a heraldic symbol of formal-representational character. The *menorah* which appears on the emblem of the State of Israel was copied from the relief carved into the Arch of Titus in Rome, where it had once stood for the suppression of the Jewish Revolt, the conquest of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the Temple. In this context, the symbol of the *menorah* expresses the thesis and antithesis of Jewish history: exile and redemption.

Natural Motifs As Messianic Symbols

The motifs from the world of nature, regarded as being

among the wonders of the universe, were referred to in the chapter on the Creation and the Creator. Here, however, their role in the ramified symbolism of the exile and hopes of redemption is highlighted.

Archaeological finds dating back to the first centuries C.E. attest to the abundance of animal depictions as motifs in synagogue decoration: alongside the gate, above the portals and in the area of the ark. While their symbolic content was undoubtedly affected by the prevailing traditions in the Mediterranean Basin, they also took on some specifically Jewish values and meanings associated with Jewish history and philosophy.

The link between depictions of the gate as a cosmic symbol and depictions of animals dates back to ancient times. Together, they often represented the transition from the corporeal to the spiritual, from the profane to the sacred, from life to death, which accounts for their use in ancient Jewish burial sites. This link between animals and gates as symbols was also manifested in the illuminations of medieval Jewish manuscripts. Here too, animals were often shown supporting the gateposts or standing alongside them.

Of all the animals, it is the lion that was the most prominent, both in the number of depictions and in the distinction it received. Its three typical positions in Jewish art are: reclining, in a position of tranquility and invulnerability as the trustworthy guardian of the Torah and the gate; roaring, a roar which symbolizes the divine power

pl. 105 to deliver either punishment or salvation; and leaping up to

pl. 106 provide support alongside another central symbol, also

pl. 107 replete with messianic associations, such as the crown, the Tree of Life or the Tablets of the Covenant, all of which

pl. 39 have come to represent the Torah in recent centuries.

Despite the fact that three-dimensional sculpture was rare in Jewish art, and was subject to many restrictions, stone statues of lions were found in the ancient synagogues of Chorazin and Baram in Palestine and Sardis in Asia Minor.

 They were also included in the mosaic floors of several

Palestinian synagogues dating from the fourth to the sixth
pl. 8 centuries. In most cases, the lions appeared next to the gate and the *menorahs* or, in other instances, alongside the
pl. 12 entrance to the prayer hall.

The symbolic link between the lion and the Torah is evident in countless examples from different periods. The mosaic floors of the ancient synagogues feature lions in the area of the holy ark. On the bottom of gold-embossed glass goblets
pl. 94 dating from the fourth century and found in Rome, an ark is shown with its doors open and a Torah scroll in its center
pl. 103 with lions nearby. Lions were frequently used as a motif on
pl. 97 Torah mantles, crowns, breastplates and holy arks.
pl. 105 The lion is mentioned many times in the Bible. It was identified with the tribes of Dan, Gad and Judah. Of these three, it was Judah that served as the most popular basis for comparison; the portrayal of the Lion as Judah was in keeping with the traditional belief that the messiah would be born of this tribe. In the Bible, the lion was mentioned in various allegories, especially in the benedictory passages. The lion is described as roaring, reclining or leaping up powerfully. Capable of both punishing and saving, it was associated with the powers of the Almighty. Its use as a symbol was largely a reflection of its central role in the prophecies concerning the End of Days.

Not only was the lion common as an allegorical motif. It is also mentioned in the Bible as a central motif in decorations of the Temple, a fact which led to its use as a symbol linking the memory of the Destruction with the hopes of redemption.

The messianic symbolism of the lion is reflected in the writings of the Sages over the years: "When the shrine was created, there were two who shared in the task: the tribe of Dan and the tribe of Judah."[27] Elsewhere, we find: "The Messiah, son of David, is called the lion's whelp, for He is descended from two tribes. His father is of Judah and His

27. *Psikta Rabbati*, 6

mother of Dan and together they are called Lion."[28] Thus, the symbolism associated with the tribes close to the shrine was transferred to the two lions and came to represent both the destroyed Kingdom of David and the Son of David; i.e., the expected Messiah.

In the prophecies about the End of Days, the bear, which stands for any wild and ferocious animal, emerges as docile and harmless. The bear motif is rare in Jewish art and is mainly to be found in Eastern Europe, probably as a result of the visual tradition of Slavic folklore. Whatever human characteristics were assigned to the bear in local folk-tales became allegorical and symbolic in Jewish art. Thus, for example, the bears were shown climbing trees and licking
pl. 69 honey — a common motif in synagogue paintings,
pl. 68 tombstone reliefs and ceremonial objects such as the spice-boxes. These bears represented the individual Jew and the Jewish people as a whole in search of the sweetness of the Torah. The tree was associated with the Tree of Life. It is in this context that the righteous man, thoroughly versed in the Torah, was to be understood — bound up with the Tree of Life and hastening the redemption by his very actions.

In paintings on the walls and ceilings of the Eastern European synagogues of the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries, the bear was sometimes depicted sitting within
pl. 67 the gate, with the Tree of Life growing out of its lap. The Tree then divided in two along the body of the bear and merged again in the flowers or fruit above it. This motif too conjures up messianic allusions, since the Kabbalah describes the Tree of Life merging with the Tree of Knowledge when redemption occurs. Thus, a theme and a symbol based on the prophecy of Isaiah took on an Eastern European shading, and the hastening of redemption was interpreted as adherence to the Torah.

The symbolic role of the eagle in Jewish art as a link between the Creation and the Creator, has already been mentioned with reference to the ancient roots of this motif

28. *Yalkut Shimoni*, Genesis 160

and the symbolism of the heavens, the heights, the sun and the sanctity associated with it. This symbolism gradually grew to include the concept of Divine Providence. While other civilizations interpreted the eagle's kingly shape as ambivalent, a possible symbol of both good and evil, both punishment and reward, Judaism put the emphasis on its positive attributes. In Kabbalistic sources, the eagle represented the divinely inspired descent of Providence: "And when it rises, it rises as a dove, and when it descends, it descends as an eagle, which has no fear of any of the other birds in the world."[29]

The verse in Deuteronomy, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young " concerning Divine Providence was allegorically extended in the *Zohar*: "Who are His fledglings? They are the Jewish people; whenever they, as fledglings, sing unto It (the Divine Providence), a song of prayer, It descends upon them."[31]

pl. 66 The abundance of this motif in Jewish art after the sixteenth
pl. 97 century is evidence of its role in Kabbalistic imagery. The
pl. 80 eagle soaring above the Torah crowns, often painted on synagogue ceilings and in the upper part of the design on ceremonial objects, was seen as symbolizing Divine Providence, which regards the Jewish people favorably. Even when the eagle is depicted as a two-headed creature, alluding to its spiritual duality — judgment vs. grace — this symbolism sometimes serves to stress that divine mercy will mediate between these two tendencies and decide in favor of the latter.

The eagle which appeared as a central motif on many Jewish
pl. 109 artistic objects in the sixteenth-nineteenth centuries often resembled the heraldic elements used by the kingdoms of Tzarist Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In other

29. *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, texts from the Book of Splendour arranged and translated into Hebrew by F. Lachover, J. Tishby, vol. II, p. 345

30. Deuteronomy 32:11

31. *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, texts from the Book of Splendour arranged and translated into Hebrew by F. Lachover, J. Tishby, vol. II, p. 345

words, the eagle used in Jewish art incorporated formal elements used by the surrounding cultures and yet, judging by the position of the eagle in compositions appearing in the synagogue and on ceremonial objects, its shape came to symbolize the Divine Providence announcing the approaching redemption.

Jewish mysticism devoted considerable attention to such subjects as the celestial elements — the heavens, the sun, the stars, the signs and zodiacs. These elements are regarded as manifestations of divine providence on earth and of the powers which are present in the struggle between evil — the devil — and the divine, positive forces. Thus, for example, the *Zohar* includes the following description: "Every star and sign in the heavens has been appointed to serve the world, each according to its fashion. There is not a single blade of grass in the world which is not ruled over by some star or sign in the heavens... no grass and no trees and no herbs can grow unless the star poses above them and shines down on them, each according to its needs." To which the writer adds, "And all this the Almighty One prepared for the correction of the world."[32]

This approach accounts for the central role of the zodiac in the synagogue, not only as a symbol of the wonders of the universe under divine inspiration but also as a representation of the divine power in the symbolic battle between good and evil.

pl. 9 As far back as the first centuries C.E., in the ancient
pl. 8 synagogue mosaics, one finds the zodiac motif as part of the
pl. 12 symbolic representation for the longings for redemption. Even in these early examples, the twelve signs seem to be associated with the twelve stones on the breastplate of the High Priest, the twelve bulls which held up the brass laver used in the Temple and, of course, the twelve Israelite tribes. These analogies attest to the fact that shapes, derived from the astrology of early oriental civilizations, worked

32. *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, texts from the Book of Splendour arranged and translated into Hebrew by F. Lachover, J. Tishby, vol. I, p. 486

their way into Jewish art and became quite prevalent.
By the seventeenth century, the growing tendency towards messianism caused the zodiac motif to gain in popularity. The tribes were often compared to the twelve signs, the righteous men to the stars, the vessels of the Temple to the signs and the Patriarchs to the sun. The visual depictions of the cosmic bodies also evolved into symbols laden with hopes of redemption, and alluding to the struggle between conflicting forces. The good and desirable forces would overcome the evil ones only insofar as each individual endeavors to mend the ways of the world by adhering to the Torah.

The Tree of Life has a crucial role as a motif in the system of Jewish symbolism. "The powers of the Almighty form a succession of layers and are like a tree. Just as the tree uses water to yield fruit, so too does the Almighty use water to strengthen the tree. And what is the Almighty One Blessed be He? He is wisdom and He is the souls of the righteous ones, which rise up out of the stream to the Great Conduit and ascend until reaching the tree and adhere to it? And how is it that they rise up? With the help of the People of Israel. For when they are righteous and good, then is the Divine Providence present in their midst."[33]

The fifth-century synagogue at Hammam Lif includes a mosaic which clearly illustrates the connection between the trees and running streams, on the one hand, and such messianic motifs as the leviathan, the Garden of Eden and
pl. 92 the legendary bull promised to the righteous in the world to come, on the other.

pl. 71 In Jewish art, the Tree of Life was a popular and central
pl. 72 motif and often incorporated different birds beside it or
pl. 73 among its branches. This motif was a favorite among Jewish artists in the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries and figured prominently in paper cuts, on tombstones and in decorations of synagogues and ceremonial objects.

33. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, 119

The Ram's Horn, the Horn and the Unicorn

The ram's horn (*shofar*) was a very common motif in ancient Jewish art. It appeared in reliefs, capitals, floor mosaics and various implements. It was often depicted near the base of
pl. 50, 51 the seven-branched *menorah*, sometimes coupled with the incense-bowl, the palm branch (*lulav*) and the citron (*etrog*),
pl. 52, 53 all of which are reminiscent of the objects used in the Temple and of the holidays celebrated within it.

The act of blowing the ram's horn and the trumpet made of metal was part of the ritual, and was to be found among many other civilizations as well. It was a means of making important announcements, rallying the forces to battle and proclaiming the coronation of kings. The horn, or pair of horns, assumed several symbolic meanings. They were frequently mentioned in the Bible, often in a context of strength and power. "The horns of the nations, which lifted up their horns over the land of Judah to scatter it."[34] In the prophecies of Restoration which promise that Jerusalem will be redeemed, the ram's horn serves as a symbol of honor and distinction. The bond between the ram's horn and redemption is underlined whenever the horn is mentioned in connection with the days of the Messiah.[35] Another Biblical allusion connects the symbolic value of blowing the ram's horn with the handing down of the Torah to the Jewish people.[36]

The messianic symbolism attributed to the act of blowing the ram's horn, inspired as it was by the imagery of kingship and redemption, was given further meaning by later Jewish traditions. Legends which gained currency in the Middle Ages referred to the prophet Elijah who would be blowing the horn three days before the arrival of the Messiah. The resurrection of the dead would also be announced by the blowing of a horn. Kabbalistic influences were instrumental in turning the sound of the ram's horn into a symbol of the

34. Zechariah 2:4
35. Isaiah 27:13
36. Exodus 19:19

harmony between the forces of justice and the forces of mercy.

pl. 21 The horn motif was to become firmly associated with the
pl. 22 Biblical story about the Binding of Isaac. God commanded that the (horned) ram be sacrificed instead of Isaac. According to tradition, the Binding took place on the Jewish New Year on Mount Moriah, and it is this tradition that accounts for the link between the ram's horn, the New Year and the site of the Temple.

In contrast to its popularity as a symbol in ancient Jewish art, the ram's horn was to become increasingly rare as an isolated motif in the painting or embossing of later periods. In the Middle Ages, it was used primarily as an element in scenes of the prophet Elijah as he announces the redemption at the gates of Jerusalem.

In later medieval Jewish art, on the other hand, there appears another symbol, also related to the ram's horn motif; namely, an imaginary animal, usually resembling a
pl. 59 *pl. 60* goat or a white horse, with one white horn in the middle of its forehead. It appears in illuminated Jewish manuscripts, in paintings within the synagogues, and later on ceremonial objects as well. This imaginary creature, known as the unicorn, developed in European Christian art. Christian sources regarded it as embodying speed, courage and purity.
pl. 62 It was often associated with the Virgin Mary and even with Jesus. The unicorn, and especially its horn, were said in Christian legend to possess miraculous powers, among them the purification of poisoned waters. Like the horn, so, too, the unicorn was seen as an ambivalent symbol, a power capable of attack and a receptacle.

Jewish art adopted the unicorn and assigned to it some additional symbolic associations. Thus, the unicorn was identified with the wild ox mentioned frequently in the Scriptures. The wild ox and its horns, as depicted in the Bible, was a fierce, supernatural force. Talmudic legend adds to its superhuman traits by depicting it as equal in size to Mount Tabor and attributing to it various miraculous

deeds. In some instances, it is described as being in confrontation with the lion: "Save me from the lion's mouth; for thou hast heard me from the horns of the wild oxen."[37] This verse was accorded various commentaries, interpretations and legends. In some of these legends, the lion and the wild ox are described as two forces possessing savage strength, which can only be controlled by divine authority. Their behavior is sometimes associated with that of King David.

From the fifteenth century, Jewish art made frequent use of the confrontation between the lion and the unicorn. In combination with other symbols, such as the gate and the Tree of Life, these two animals assumed a symbolic, messianic dimension which defies rational explanation.

37. Psalms 22:22

4 *The Search for Means of Identification*

Many of the symbolic motifs which developed in the Jewish art of the centuries directly following the destruction of the Temple lasted through the nineteenth century and referred to subjects which have always been at the heart of Jewish thought, such as exile and redemption, the Creation and the Creator.

As the Enlightenment and the Emancipation spread throughout the countries of Europe, beginning in the late-eighteenth century and through the nineteenth, Jewish thought and the Jewish way of life underwent far-reaching changes, which were bound to be reflected in the symbolic motifs as well. The *menorah*, the crown and the animals became scarce. Compositions consisting of motifs related to the messianic idea disappeared from the decorations of the new and lavish synagogues being built in Western and Central Europe. Two relatively new symbols were to replace the old: the Star of David and the Tablets of the Covenant.

While it is true that the Star and the Tablets had been found in the Jewish art of pre-Emancipation times, the way in which they were now positioned, in the most prominent parts of the facades and rooftops of the synagogues, above the main entrances and over the flagposts, was a dramatic innovation. The Star of David and/or the Tablets of the

pl. 116
pl. 42
63

Covenant became an almost inseparable part of the
pl. 117 synagogue structure. They were even mentioned explicitly in the guidelines to the architects. Their conspicuousness reflected the new character of the Jewish presence: communities and individuals had become financially well-established and regarded themselves as completely equal to those around them.

The selection of symbols and the manner in which they were displayed were an indication of the new problems besetting the question of Jewish identity: the visual symbols being shown to the world were in keeping with the desire of Emancipation Jewry for a clear identity, which would be readily understood by their non-Jewish neighbors. Judaism as a whole was represented by the very same means which had gained currency in the surrounding communities: the Star of David and the Tablets of the Covenant were displayed in the very same manner that the cross was displayed in the Christian church. Thus did the Jews express their desire to be understood by those around them while defining their Jewishness as a unique cultural and religious framework.

To the enlightened Jews of Europe, the religious-mystical way of looking at the world was characteristic of the foregoing generations. By severing themselves from the old, traditional symbols they hoped to sever themselves from whatever outlook those generations represented. The infiltration of Kabbalistic ideas into the art and symbols was frowned upon by those who now wished to address themselves openly to their Christian neighbors and to blend into European culture. Many of the enlightened Jews were intent on stressing that Judaism may be collectively identified as a way of life, a culture and a religion, but not as a group possessing national aspirations. A culture of that type required symbols which could be identified at a glance. The style and central location of the new synagogues, which were designed by professional architects, clearly reflect the
 desire to build shrines which would be "cultured" and

"esthetic," in keeping with the tastes of the day. The architects, many of them non-Jews, sought a style which would do justice to the synagogue. The extent to which the building would blend into the local culture and style or would stand out as specifically Jewish was subject to debate. The choice of such styles as "Romanesque", "Gothic", "Moslem" (all of them in fact eclectic) was explained by their conformity to the surrounding culture or by their ability to represent a singularly Jewish identity.

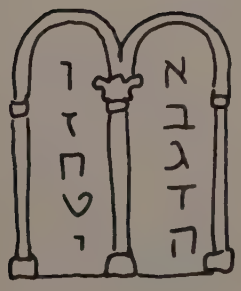
The central position of the Star of David and the Tablets of the Covenant in the synagogue accounted for their popularity and their growing use in many varied areas of Jewish art and popular craftsmanship after the period of the Emancipation. In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these two became central shapes in the design of the holy ark as well as ceremonial objects and even in articles for everyday use. These symbols were to make their way into other areas of modern life as well — newspapers and various social and political associations and organizations — so that they were bound to become the most characteristic mark of Jewish identity, par excellence.

pl. 118

pl 39, pl. 123

The Tablets of the Covenant

The shape of the Tablets, which gained currency in the Jewish art of recent generations does not derive from any written Jewish sources. In fact, it was in Christian art that this shape actually evolved. The shape of the vertical rectangle, rounded at the top, essentially an arched gateway, has a long history in the different civilizations and in different periods, in architecture, monuments, carving and painting. Quite often, the upper semi-circle, resembling the dome-shape of the heavens, was used to represent planets, signs, the sun, a conch or an eagle, symbols which stand for the heavenly powers, while the lower, rectangular part represented the earthly elements. In other words, the fact that this abstract geometric shape was a symbolic



representation of the meeting between Heaven and earth contributed to its growing use in the form of the Tablets given by God to the people of Israel.

Christian art dealt extensively with the Revelation at Mount Sinai where Moses received the Tablets of the Covenant. It depicted the Tablets either as square stone plates or as a scroll. In medieval Christian art, especially in France and Germany, they are shown as two plates joined at their rounded upper tips, probably due to the influence of the foldable, portable diptych so common in the Christian churches. This shape was to become a readily identifiable symbol of Moses.

Apart from their use in paintings and reliefs depicting Moses, the Tablets also appeared in the hands of the Synagogue — the Christian medieval personification of Judaism as a woman with her eyes tied shut, carrying a broken flag and the Tablets of the Covenant. This figure often appeared as a statue or as part of stained glass windows in the Gothic cathedrals. Synagoga was usually shown holding the Tablets upside-down, a hint to the effect that Judaism does not understand the teachings which it itself received, in which the coming of Jesus the Messiah was anticipated. The rectangular, round-tipped tablets made it possible to stress the symbolic value of turning them right-side-up. In the hands of the Synagoga, the humiliated queen who has lost her right to rule, the Tablets became part of a collective symbol of Judaism in Christian eyes.

pl. 35

pl. 34

The Jews themselves also accepted the rounded rectangular panels as a conventional way of representing the Tablets; e.g., in depictions of the handing down of the Torah, in Passover Hagaddahs. In the Birds' Head Hagaddah (Germany, 1300), an illustration in the margin shows Moses receiving the Tablets, which are rounded at the top. Alongside this portrayal there appear five interconnected panels, which the artist apparently chose as a way of emphasizing the five books of the Torah. This Jewish viewpoint, that the teachings of the Torah cannot be

pl. 33

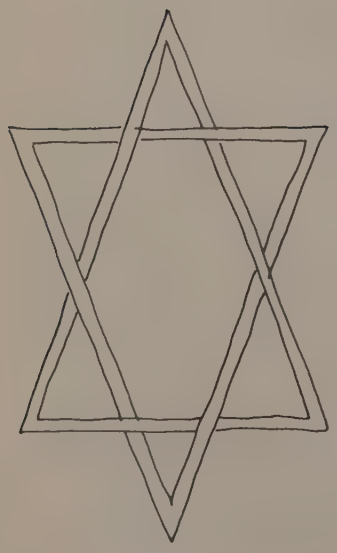
confined to the Ten Commandments and that every detail of it is meaningful, can be traced back to Talmudic times. The Tablets do not appear as an independent symbol, detached from the handing down of the Torah, until the fifteenth century, and even then not commonly. In the sixteenth century, the Tablets in isolation gradually grew more widespread and appeared in the embellishments of holy arks, especially in the Italian synagogues. The holy ark was beginning at that time to stand out as a focal part of the eastern wall of the synagogue interior, as a symbol of the shrine in which the Tablets had originally been kept. The non-Jewish environment was influential in the development of an artistic approach geared towards representative signs and heraldic symbols. The preference for the Tablets as a central visual symbol in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries was also influenced by this approach to the Torah not only as a source of knowledge and commandments but as a symbol as well, as it developed in the Kabbalah, so it was not surprising that this symbol flourished in Italy and Eastern Europe, important centers of Kabbalistic thought. It was in the nineteenth century, however, during the Enlightenment generation, which strove to shake off the mystical tradition of the Kabbalah, that the shape of the Tablets reached the peak of its development and popularity. The nineteenth century also elevated Moses as a spiritual figure and the Revelation at Mount Sinai to the forefront of Jewish values. Many contemporary thinkers saw fit to emphasize the ancient sources and to espouse "Mosaism" as the antithesis of Talmudic tradition. The emphasis which the surrounding cultures placed on moral and legal issues at the time contributed to the popularity of the shape of the Tablets as a symbol of the people which had given the world that ancient codex, the Torah.

pl. 40 The Tablets appear on many of the medallions issued when the Jews were officially granted rights. Jews and Christians alike identified them with Jewry, which explains their frequent use over the entrances and gables on the facades of

pl. 42 synagogues. The Tablets remained in use as decorations for buildings and ceremonial objects and on items possessing religious and religio-national associations and continue to be used in this manner throughout the twentieth century as well. Their shape is widely known in our day as the modern symbol of religious Jewry.

The Star of David

The shape known today as the Star of David (*Magen David*) has evolved over the past two centuries as the central and principal symbol of Judaism. Until the eighteenth century, however, it did not yet carry the associations that it bears today. The six-pointed star appears on the carved stone
pl. 14 beam at the ancient synagogue of Capernaum along with various other shapes which had gained currency in that period. These shapes may have taken on apotropaic characteristics as well, in addition to their decorative role. In the Middle Ages, the Star of David was included in illuminations of Hebrew manuscripts. It was sometimes used in pages of micrography, in which case it consisted of miniature lettering. The Star of David was often painted onto the margins of *mezuzahs*, on Kabbalistic manuscripts and on amulets. In the seventeenth century, it was regarded by various groups as a messianic symbol.



The Star of David enclosed in a circle was a common decorative motif in Moslem, Christian and Buddhist civilizations as well. It may have borne the same symbolism as the Far Eastern *mandala* studied by Jung. The six-pointed star then may perhaps be an expression of the universal psychological needs of man in his struggle with the forces of nature and the cosmos.

But it was not the mystical and magical aspects of the Star of David that appealed most to Emancipation Jews when they chose to adopt it as a central symbol. In all likelihood, they took the form from the seals and banners of such

 Central European Jewish communities as Prague and

Vienna, which included the six-pointed star. In these few communities, the Jews seem to have chosen the Star of David — whether of their own volition or at the behest of the regime — as a heraldic symbol.

The Star of David reached the peak of its popularity and was to be found in the largest number of communities after it was selected to stand at the top of the new synagogues built in the nineteenth century. Its form seemed to be an apt response to that of the Christian cross over the church, and it came to be identified as the collective Jewish symbol. The fact that rationalist Jewry, which was keen on dissociating itself from its mystical past, chose a form previously associated with mystical beliefs was, in a sense, a historical paradox. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the Star of David also remained in use among Christian mystical groups and in certain Jewish communities which were far removed from the centers of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation.

pl. 116
pl. 117

The Eastern European communities were rather slow in accepting the Star of David as their collective symbol, and did so quite late. In Moslem countries, on the other hand, it was soon to be incorporated into the decorations of ritual objects, and became especially popular on Hanukkah *menorahs* and Torah breastplates in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was a shape that was frequently combined with other circular forms such as the rosette. These combinations may have echoed meanings associated in cosmic symbolism with the Star of David. Its national overtones in the eastern countries were the result of historical developments. In 1897, the Star of David was chosen as the emblem of the first Zionist Congress in Basel and of the newspaper *Die Welt*, edited by Theodor Herzl, which was to become the official organ of the Zionist movement.

pl. 119
pl. 120
pl. 122
pl. 124
pl. 125

Within a fairly short time, the Star of David developed from the symbol of Emancipation Jewry, which had turned its back on the mystical longings for redemption in the

Middle Ages, into the symbol of Zionism, the movement which strove for national redemption.

pl. 131 The Star of David took on another dimension of emotional depth during the Holocaust. The Nazis chose it as the means of identifying and humiliating the Jews, in ghettos, concentration camps and extermination camps, where they were forced to wear it as a yellow patch attached to their lapels or as a marking on their sleeves. More than any other symbol, it was the yellow Star of David that represented the tragedy of the Jewish fate.

Today, the Star of David appears in the center of the flag of Israel and has become the most familiar Jewish symbol in the world.

Collective and Individual Symbols

Along with the growth in the popularity of the two relatively new collective symbols of Judaism, the Star of David and the Tablets of the Covenant, there developed a tendency to convert some of the traditional ones into means of individual identification. The lion, the Tree of Life, the deer, the signs and other symbols were adopted by individuals, families and commercial firms. Although the process had already begun before the nineteenth century, it was during that century that it became common practice. In Italy and Holland, where Jews were especially receptive to surrounding influences, the use of collective symbols to identify an individual had begun even before the Emancipation. Especially interesting in this respect are the tombstones in the Jewish cemetery of Oderkirk near Amsterdam — not only because of the style of their marble carvings but because of their ample use of individualized symbols. On some of these tombstones, for example, there appears a felled tree, the Tree of Life cut down while still in its prime, symbolizing the fact that the deceased had been young. On one of them, the King of David is shown in a scene based on Biblical tales, alluding to the name of the

deceased, David. The use of a tombstone carving to refer to the person who had been buried was to grow very popular in many Jewish communities. In Prague, for instance, the lion often appears on tombstones of men whose name had been Arieh (Hebrew for *lion*), Leib or Leon.

Another common practice in Eastern Europe was found on the graves of women. A *menorah* shaped like a winding plant was engraved on the tombstone with flames in its upper section. This combination of the Tree of Life and the *menorah* symbolizing the Sabbath candlesticks, though also associated at times with the seven-branched *menorah*,

pl. 23 represented the righteous woman lighting the Sabbath candles.

One important means of disseminating the symbols rooted in the collective tradition and used as means of identifying the individual were Hebrew books. It follows that the development of printing was instrumental in the process. Clichés used by Christian printers, especially for title pages and borders, were often transferred from Christian to Jewish printers, and vice versa. Details in the woodcut or copper engraving may have been changed to adapt them to the Hebrew book, since the Jewish printers made a point of avoiding any expressly Christian symbol, such as the cross. Nevertheless, this cooperation helped to introduce new motifs and brought about new uses of symbols.

pl. 112 The Hebrew printers also adopted their own symbols, which usually included such traditionally Jewish motifs as the Tree of Life, animals or signs, incorporating personal or family marks of identification, such as names or initials. This reinforced the connection between the motif and the name. Thus, for example, a printer's mark of a printer whose name

pl. 108 was Zvi or Hirsch (both meaning *deer*) would include the picture of a deer. A printer born under the sign of Pisces would include a picture of fish on his mark. The tendency to regard the zodiac as a national symbol bearing multiple meanings declined. Each of the signs became a means of

 identifying individuals, and developed into heraldic-

commercial signs. This process gained momentum in modern times, and unlike the traditional collective symbols, which had been imbued with mystical meanings and many different religious-national associations, the modern symbols forming the core of contemporary Jewish symbolism are clear and well-defined. They symbolize either the whole of Jewry or specific families, communities, organizations and companies.

5 A Meeting of Cultures

The changes in Jewish lifestyle in modern times and the new approaches in Jewish thought were reflected in the symbolism of art as well. The Emancipation, as we mentioned above, led to a growing emphasis on those symbols which clearly represented Judaism to the outside world. They appeared on buildings, newspapers and books and served a function not unlike that of the flag or the heraldic symbol.

The twentieth century brought with it a growing interest in such symbols as the Star of David and the Tablets of the Covenant, but along with these, the seven-branched *menorah* and other traditional motifs symbolizing the Temple and Jerusalem also enjoyed a surge of popularity. The conscious choice of such symbols was reinforced by finds from Near Eastern archaeological digs, especially in Palestine, and by the Zionist national awakening. The synagogue at Essen is a typical example of such an array of symbols. The decorations of this synagogue, built in 1913, offer an extensive assortment of Jewish symbols, incorporated into the designs of its gateways, windows, ceilings and walls. Rabbis who were conversant with the Jewish sources guided the expert craftsmen who made the mosaics, stained glass windows and bronze reliefs. Unlike the German synagogues of the nineteenth century, the Essen synagogue included a

pl. 134-143

menorah on its facade. The decorations in the hall included the Tablets, the Star of David, the Tree of Life, the eagle, the lions, the pillars of the Temple, gateways and various other items associated with the Bible, the Scriptural interpretations, the homilies and archeological finds from the Holy Land.

In the late nineteenth century, Jewish artists began incorporating Jewish symbols in their individual works.

pl. 126-129 E.M. Lilien (1874-1925) expressed his solidarity with the new national ambitions of the Zionist movement by using traditional symbols in new contexts. Along with portraits of Herzl and idyllic paintings of the landscape in Palestine, Lilien made ample use of such symbols as the Star of David and the *menorah*. His many drawings and etchings are an example of the new and conscious attempt to express concepts like redemption and national renewal through symbols and through the paintings of people and landscapes which were in themselves symbolic.

These tendencies were, on the whole, typical of the artists involved in founding the Hebrew Academy of Art in Jerusalem (*Bezalel*). Lilien himself was one of the teachers on the staff. These artists did not confine themselves to the extensive use of symbols, often rather contrived; they also

pl. 132 dealt in figurative paintings, especially of Jerusalem

pl. 133 landscapes and typical local characters.

The religious restrictions which had limited the figurative painter in the past did not deter Jewish artists in the twentieth century. Many of them took their place at the forefront of modern art despite the traditional Jewish character of the Eastern European towns from which they came.

In their lives and work, many modern artists have represented the meeting ground between symbols and contents rooted in the Jewish experience, on the one hand, and the artistic values of western civilization, on the other. Among these artists are Marc Chagall, Jacques Lipchitz, Ben Shahn, Mordechai Ardon, Moshe Castel, Naftali Bezem and

Yaakov Agam. Unlike the artists of the first generation at Bezalel, who were guided by an avowed national direction, Chagall, Lipchitz, Ben Shahn, Ardon and Agam created a synthesis between the Jewish and the universal, both in imagery and symbols.

Several of the paintings of Marc Chagall, for example, use the crucified figure to signify the suffering of the tortured Jew. In a painting titled "The White Crucifixion", the figure is wrapped in a Jewish prayer shawl. For generations, the Jews had eliminated from their works of art any hint of the shape of a cross, until the twentieth century Jewish artist made the conscious choice to use familiar symbols known to Jews and Christians alike and to merge them into a common symbolic expression. The sculptor Jacques Lipchitz, who was also born in Eastern Europe but spent most of his working years in the West, created many sculptures modeled on mythological creatures. The theme of Prometheus, which occurs so frequently in his work, stands for the war of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness. Prometheus struggling against the cruelly attacking eagle in Lipchitz's sculptures represents the battle of the Jewish people and the enlightened world against the Nazi monster. The eagle, which had once been a symbol of mercy, protection and security in Jewish tradition, here stands for brutal strength as manifested in the enemy of the Jewish people and of all humanity.

pl. 159

pl. 151

The work of the Jewish-American artist Ben Shahn also shows traces of his Eastern European experiences and of Jewish motifs. The Hebrew letters which he learned by rote in childhood, coupled with the Kabbalistic stories, evolved into symbolic representations of the Creation and of human existence. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet recur in his paintings, alongside other themes, expressing a universalist involvement in the burning issues.

pl. 146, 147

Israeli artist Mordechai Ardon combined mystical motifs from the Jewish sources with impressions from nature and philosophical thought. Symbols taken from the Kabbalah,

pl. 31 *pl. 144* *pl. 145* such as the Tree of *Sefirot* and the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, blend into the colorful compositions and help Ardon to express the complex relations between microcosm and macrocosm.

The paintings of yet another Israeli artist, Naftali Bezem, make ample use of such symbols as the lion, fish, *menorah*, ladder, ram's horn and Tree of Life. These motifs, laden as they are with symbolic associations, express both the impact of the Holocaust and the hint of national revival.

pl. 149 *pl. 156*

pl. 153 *pl. 154* In the work of Israeli artist Yaakov Agam, the symbols and influences of Jewish philosophy take on a plastic, abstract dimension. In addition to such shapes as the Star of David and the seven-branched *menorah*, his work, as he himself attests, is influenced by Jewish symbolicism and philosophy. The few examples noted here are an illustration of the fact that one no longer finds a clear-cut distinction between the national-specific and the universal when it comes to motifs in art.

6 *Symbolism in the Synagogue*

The Mosaic Floor of the Bet Alpha Synagogue as a Symbolic Configuration

pl. 7, 8, 22

The mosaic floor of the sixth-century Bet Alpha synagogue covers the entire nave of the prayer-hall. It extends from the narthex of the hall to the niche for the ark, located in the wall oriented toward Jerusalem. The mosaic consists of three main pictures, framed by a broad decorative border made up of diamond shapes with baskets of fruit and clusters of grapes, and a design of grape vines intertwined around pictures of various animals. At either end of the border design, flanking the entrance to the nave, a lion and a bull are portrayed facing each other. Between these two animals is an inscription indicating when the mosaic was made and by whom.

The lion and the bull appear as a part of the border design surrounding the mosaic, yet they are noticeably larger than the remaining motifs. This points to their importance in the overall symbolism of the mosaic.

Of the three panels in the central mosaic, the one closest to the entrance describes the Binding of Isaac. To the right we see Abraham preparing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on the altar. Behind him is a ram with its horns caught in a tree, and to the left is an ass being led by two attendants.

Emphasis is placed on the right hand side of the picture,

where the importance of the event is brought out by the composition and framing, as well as by the addition of the names "Isaac" and "Abraham", and the phrases, "Lay not [thine hand upon the lad]" and "Behold, a ram". The hand, symbolizing divine intervention, also faces the right side, towards the figures of Abraham and Isaac. This hand, reaching forth from a radiant orb, is located on the border between the upper part of the picture of the Binding of Isaac and a row of palm trees. This row of palm trees separates the Binding of Isaac from the central and largest panel of the mosaic, which displays the zodiac.

The zodiac is divided into twelve parts, containing the signs. The central circle portrays a figure in a chariot harnessed to four horses, surrounded by moon and stars, with the head of the rider encircled by rays of light. This is a representation of the sun and stars in the person of Helios, the sun-god in pagan art. A similar figure, with certain stylistic alterations, has been found in a number of ancient synagogues in Israel. The zodiac is enclosed in a square, with the four seasons of the year portrayed in the corners, where the phrases *Tekufat Tevet* (winter), *Tekufat Nissan* (spring), *Tekufat Tamuz* (summer), and *Tekufat Tishri* (fall) appear.

The panel which borders on the zodiac closest to the niche for the ark comprises many details. In the center is a facade of a building, consisting of a gate with doors shut, supported by two pilasters, and covered with a gable. In the middle of the gable is a conch, with an oil lamp hanging above it. Two horns are connected to the upper sections of the pilasters, with birds perched near them. Lions face the gate on either side, and above them are two seven-branched *menorahs*. At the feet of the *menorahs* are designs of a tree, a ram's horn, an incense bowl, a palm branch and a citron.

Stylistically the mosaic is characterized by a flat, schematic presentation. The lines are pronounced and the colors vibrant. The two-dimensional, even abstract schematic quality underscores the symbolic significance. The conclusion that this is a configuration containing two central

symbolic themes, the Creator and Creation, and exile and redemption, is inescapable.

The might of the Creator is demonstrated by the wonders of the universe, first and foremost by the motion of time and space. The cosmos and the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm find expression in each of the panels of the mosaic. The Binding of Isaac portrays the miracle wrought by God, and the covenant between the Creator and His creations. The hand of God, intercepting the dividing line between the earthly, at the bottom of the mosaic, and the heavenly, in the zodiac, serves as a bridge between the abstract qualities of the Deity and the concrete manifestation of His works on earth.

The zodiac symbolizes the Kingdom of Heaven, containing the sun, the moon and the stars. It also stands for the wheel of time with the twelve zodiac signs symbolizing the months of the year and the twelve hours of the day or night. The figures representing the seasons, in the four corners, complete the wheel of time and space. This array of symbols representing time and space also fits in with the motifs portrayed on the panel closest to the niche. The gate which is in the center of this panel represents the transition from the material to the spiritual, from the earthly to the heavenly. The pilasters, which are part of the gate, symbolize the foundations of the universe. The seven-branched *menorah* also is suggestive of the course of time. Its seven branches stand for the seven days of the week. If we accept Philo's interpretation, we may attribute cosmic significance to the seven lights as representing the sun and the planets, and to the gold of the *menorah* as symbolizing the purity of the heavens. Before all else, however, the seven-branched *menorah* is a symbol of the *menorah* of the ravaged Temple. The Tree of Life and the birds which appear in this panel of the mosaic also fit into the symbolic array of the wonders of the cosmos and universe.

The gate, representing the ark, is a symbol replete with significance, including a likeness to the Temple and its gates,

and the altar. The ram's horn, the incense bowl and other details also bring to mind the Temple with its rituals and its celebration of the holidays.

The zodiac, too, alludes to remembrance of the Temple. The number twelve stands for the twelve stones in the breastplate of the High Priest and the twelve bulls which held up the brass laver in the Temple.

The twelve stars have been likened in literature to the twelve tribes of Israel, thus representing the wholeness of the Jewish people. Through them an allusion is made to the unity of the people during the time of the Solomonic Temple, and to messianic hopes.

In works of the Sages, Abraham is likened to the sun among the stars: "And why did He create the sun? The sun is like Abraham the Patriarch, who brightens the entire world." The image of Abraham in the mosaic may be seen as linking the panel of the zodiac, with the sun in its center, to the panel showing the Binding of Isaac, where Abraham represents the willingness to make a supreme sacrifice. Moreover, the Binding of Isaac is said to have taken place on Mount Moriah, the site of the Temple.

The border pattern of the mosaic is not incidental either. The fruits, grapevines and animals depicted in it stand for the abundance of Creation. At the same time these motifs may also be suggestive of the Garden of Eden, and by extension of the End of Days. In this light we can understand the prominence given to the legendary bull and the lion, which are depicted in the mosaic as standing guard over the entrance way.

All in all, it emerges that the various motifs in the mosaic floor at Bet Alpha are interrelated in terms of their subject matter and their symbolism. Despite its division into separate panels, this colorful work is a composition of outstanding esthetic and symbolic unity, and is suggestive of two central themes of Jewish spiritual life — the relationship of the Creator to Creation, and the connection between remembrance of the Temple and hope of redemption.

The Painted Ceiling of the Hodorov Synagogue and its Symbolism

pl. 17, 59, 60, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 72, 73

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a flourishing school of Jewish painting which centered largely in southeastern Poland. The artists devoted themselves to covering the walls and ceilings of these synagogues with colorful paintings, creating a veritable tapestry of motifs. All of these synagogues were burned down in World War II. The scanty visual and textual evidence of them which has survived indicates that the paintings from the synagogues of Gwozdziec and Hodorov merit special attention.

The wall paintings in the prayer halls of these synagogues included passages from the liturgy, written in large, clear letters and surrounded by border designs of plants and pillars of gates. As for the ceilings, they were ornamented with a rich selection of motifs from the world of flora and fauna, surrounded by border designs incorporating written verses. The synagogue at Gwozdziec stands out among the other wooden synagogues of Eastern Europe for the intricate design of its roof, with ceiling paintings extending over many levels. The painted ceiling at Hodorov was more centralized, and relatively simple in structure. Its main, and most important, section was a barrel-shaped vault, the central and largest portion of which was decorated with the zodiac. A two-headed crowned eagle appears in the circle circumscribed by the signs of the zodiac. The eagle is portrayed holding two hares in his claws, and is surrounded by the verse, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest..." (Deuteronomy 32:11), between ornamental borders. Due to the arching of the ceiling, the eagle is at the very highest point. Equally high, at either end of the zodiac, are two more circles. In one is a group of three fish, in the other three hares. These two circles are situated at the point where the crests of trees which appear along the entire length of the vaulted ceiling come together. The tree designs are composed of a trunk, leaves, flowers and pairs of

birds. In the corners of the ceiling, near the base of the trees, are four rectangular paintings, displaying beasts of prey attacking helpless creatures. On either side, between these rectangles, prominence is given to two border patterns, which resemble a gate with two pillars supporting an arch. A sitting bear is painted in one of the gates, and a lion confronting a unicorn in the other. A flowering bush is incorporated into each picture.

The background of the entire ceiling is decorated with a rich interplay of plants and pairs of animals. On the inclined surfaces joining the barrel-vault to the walls of the hall are two more rows of pictures. These display animals, highlighted by the decorative borders around them. Several of them are especially noteworthy: a lioness, sitting and chewing a flower; an elephant carrying a tower on its back, flanked by trees on and beside which are perched storks holding snake-like reptiles in their mouths; a hind grazing peacefully; an eagle gripping a hare in its beak and claws. On either side of the eagle are trees on which bears are climbing, and on the crest of one of the trees is a pot of honey. Large conches fan out downwards to span the angles between the four corners of the ceiling and the walls of the hall.

This painted ceiling is like a song of praise to the Creator, sung by his creations. The abundance of divine creation is presented in sharp lines and strong colors. The composition is a harmonious whole in which the colorful portrayal of the universe represents the perfection of Creation. The eagle, associated with the heights, the heavens and fire, is surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac, representing the stars, to form a symbolic representation of the celestial realm, which expresses the greatness of the Creator, and which works His will upon earth.

The central portion of the ceiling consists of circles suggesting cosmic associations. The circles adjacent to the zodiac, which contain fish and hares, symbolize water and earth. Thus the fundamental elements of the universe —

heavens, sun, fire, water and earth — are all represented in the highest portion of the ceiling. The motion of the planets, the seasons of the year, and the hours of the day and night, too, are represented by the twelve zodiacal signs.
Animals, arranged two by two in the background, emphasize the fundamental nature of Creation. The stress on the number three, in the composition of the fish and the hares, symbolizes three elements of the universe which form a single whole: air, fire and water.
The various creatures painted in many places on the ceiling and along its sides represent the different kinds of animals: beasts of prey, tame animals and birds. They stand for various traits attributed to them in folklore, such as aggressiveness, weakness, suffering and wisdom.
All of these pictures have manifold symbolism, for besides expressing a desire to praise the grandeur of Creation and make it tangible, they also express symbolic messianic aspirations. The period when this ceiling was painted coincides with the rise of mysticism and messianic movements throughout Poland. Kabbalistic symbolism and imagery were common among the Jews of the region, and their impact is manifest in the paintings of the ceiling.
The pictures of the beasts of prey and their victims may be an allegory for the satanic forces at work on earth. At the same time they allude to the actual trials and tribulations which beset the Jews. The arrangement of the compositions around the periphery, in the rectangular frames, and the details of scenery hinted at in the background lend a more earthly atmosphere to events and help symbolize the Exile which, under the influence of the Kabbalah, was perceived as the crisis preceding the perfection of the world. In contrast, the pictures next to these, framed in arches resembling gates, including the bear at one end and the lion in battle with the unicorn at the other, are symbols which bring tidings of redemption. The bear, known in folklore as a restless animal, is portrayed here sitting peacefully, with the Tree of Life rising out of its lap. Blossoming branches,

which stem from a single source at the bear's feet, split in two on either side of the seated animal and re-unite in a single flower over his head. The bear encircled with flowers evokes associations of the prophecy of the End of Days. The Tree of Life which splits in two and then comes together again perhaps symbolizes the mystical Kabbalistic dualism according to which the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge express different forces acting in the universe. The unification of the two symbolizes the messianic era.

The lion and the unicorn, painted opposite the bear and framed in a similar way, represent forces of great strength which reach a certain balance, thus making it possible for the forces of life and redemption to grow in them. These forces are symbolized by the Tree of Life. It is hard to tell whether the two animals, which possess supernatural strength, are embracing one another or wrestling. The large, strong horn appears stuck in the lion's mouth, an image which calls to mind the blowing of the ram's horn. The blast of the horn is suggestive of victory, kingship and the coming of the Messiah.

The upper portion of both these pictures borders on the zodiac, so that they serve as a transition between the microcosm and the macrocosm. The trees growing out of the four corners of the ceiling symbolically unite the four corners of the earth constituting a bridge between the earthly and the heavenly. The crests of the trees come together at the highest part of the ceiling, where they blend into the circles. Perhaps this is a plastic expression of the Kabbalistic allusion to the Godly forces growing as a tree into Creation. The righteous man, who is the foundation of the universe, is likened to a tree. The birds among the branches of the trees in the painting symbolize the souls of the righteous.

Elsewhere on the ceiling is a painting of a lioness chewing a flower, a clear allusion to the End of Days. The hind, which in the *Zohar* is a symbol of the Divine Presence, can be seen

here grazing peacefully. The elephant carrying a tower is a symbol of might which has known submission and forebearance. The eagle which either attacks or defends hares represents either justice or mercy. The scales tip in favor of mercy when bears climbing on a tree — the Jews aspiring to learn Torah — are painted by the sides of the eagle. Study of the Torah and observance of its commandments help speed the coming of redemption. The entire composition shows the impact of Lurianic Kabbalah from Safed which, from the sixteenth century on, was very widespread in Eastern Europe. According to this philosophy, the behavior of every individual Jew has a direct bearing on the process by which the world will be brought to a state of perfection.

The two-headed eagle in the center of the ceiling represents the way the divine forces work. The crown on its head calls to mind the Kabbalistic notions of the first of the *Sefirot*, known as the *Keter* or *crown*, which is the one closest to the Infinite. The physical doubling of the eagle is symbolic of its spiritual dualism. Its watchful eye looks everywhere, and its providence finds expression both in justice and in mercy. The measure of mercy overcomes, as hinted at by the verse circumscribing it.

The eagle descending from the heights symbolizes the Divine Providence (Shekhinah) hares in its claws are an allegory for the persecuted Jews seeking refuge.

A rich symbolism attaches to the image of the eagle. It is attributed with divine powers of deliverance and watchful protection. Surrounding the eagle in this symbolic system is the Jewish people, represented by the twelve signs of the zodiac which stand for the twelve tribes. All this comes to us via the notion that protection by the Divine Presence depends on man's prayer and his adherence to the Torah, as suggested pictorially by the bears climbing up to the honey and by the verses from Scriptures and works of the Sages, written on the ceiling and walls and relating to the importance of prayer.

The four large conches painted in the four corners of the hall, near the ceiling, add a feeling of protection and are suggestive of the symbolism of the conch, as it evolved over the ages in Jewish art: closeness to the Torah, deliverance and redemption.

Three Torah Crowns and their Symbols

pl. 97, 96, 107, 106

Three crowns for Torah scrolls made in Eastern Europe during the same period are the subject of this chapter. Stylistically they all belong to the same type, despite a certain compositional difference in their motifs. Their design is based on several circular tiers rising one above the other, with the lowest one crowning the Torah scroll. The lowest circle, which serves as the base of the crown, is the largest tier. Lions, leaping upwards, are mounted upon it. They are wrought three-dimensionally, creating an open space between them. The lions support a second, and smaller, crown and bridge the space between the two. They display an unusual movement of the head, looking backwards, and opening the composition of the entire crown outwards, towards its surroundings. Thus far, this description is applicable to all three crowns.

Henceforth the motifs of the crowns differ. Over the top one (pl. 107) is a pillar-like structure, which evokes associations of the Temple. Above that, surmounting the entire composition, is a shape which calls to mind something flowing upwards. Comparing this detail with the upper portion of the crown in pl. 107, it is clear that both are similar in form, but that the latter includes a bird which appears to be drinking water — doubtlessly from a spring which issues from below. It is reasonable to assume that the uppermost shape in crown 107 is based on the same symbolic figure, even though it does not include the bird perched by the spring.

Crown 96 rises to a great height. A row of griffins is mounted above the upper crown, and an eagle spreading its

wings is perched at the very top of the crown. The higher the animals on the three tiers, the smaller their dimensions, culminating with the sole eagle at the top. The entire composition creates a sense of ascent, with the eagle gazing down on everything below.

The lions provide a bridge between the base, which fits onto the Torah scroll, and the remaining parts of the crown, rising airily on high. Above them are the griffins, fabulous creatures with a lion's hind and chest and the head of a bird. They give a sense of elevation towards the heavenly sphere. In the third and uppermost position is the eagle, a figure replete with symbolism, evoking associations of the heavens, fire and Divine Providence. The crown in its entirety creates an image of transition from the earthly to the heavenly.

Crowns 106 and 107 include additional motifs, carved around the circle forming the base of the crown. Signs of the zodiac surround the base of crown 107. Two-headed eagles, with flowers, grape vines and clusters of grapes winding among them, fill this position on crown 106.

Besides the symbolism relating to the Torah and its place in the life of the people, the composition of these three Torah crowns also presents a symbolic configuration suggestive of messianic leanings. The zodiac, for example, which among other things symbolizes the tribes of Israel, is supporting figures of lions, a symbol of the Kingdom of David. They are portrayed as raising the Temple on high and bringing it closer to the spring at the very top, which is tied in with the Garden of Eden and the End of Days. The twelve zodiacal signs can also be seen as symbolic of the yearly cycle and its holidays and festivals. They also serve as an allusion to the Temple. The spring wells forth from all the symbolic motifs below it and stands for the Torah, which is likened to a source of living waters for those who study it and hasten redemption. The bird drinking the water of the fountain in crown 106 apparently symbolizes the righteous man. The two-headed eagle portrayed on the base serves to emphasize

the dual meaning of Divine Providence — justice and mercy. Studying Torah tips the scales towards the side of mercy and hastens the Restoration of the world.

The symbolism of the eagle portrayed at the top of the composition of crown 96 may be understood in a similar way. Its elevated position, in a direction contrary to that of all the other animals, which are portrayed reaching upwards, conjures up an image of descent from Heaven, just as the Divine Presence will descend upon the People of Israel.

The motifs ornamenting these Torah crowns symbolize the interdependence between the Torah as signifying the importance of observance and of its concomitant liturgical rites, and the Torah as a multifaceted symbol deeply rooted in the extensively developed theme of exile and redemption.

List of Plates

1. *The Sun God*, Babylonian relief, stone, 9th century B.C.E.
2. Floor plan of Ḥusifah synagogue, 5th century
3. Floor plan of Japhia synagogue, 4th century
4. Stone ossuary, Jerusalem, 1st century B.C.E. — 1st century C.E.
5. Detail of carved stone beam, Chorazin synagogue
6. Detail of carved stone beam, Chorazin synagogue
7. Zodiac and seasons, central detail of the floor mosaic in the Bet Alpha synagogue, 6th century
8. Floor mosaic of Bet Alpha synagogue, 6th century
9. Drawing of floor mosaic at Naaran synagogue, 6th century
10. Carved stone door of ancient tomb, Kfar Yassif
11. Central section of floor mosaic, Kyria-Maria Monastery, Bet Shean, 6th century
12. Floor mosaic of Hammath Tiberias synagogue, 4th century
13. Illustration from the *Etz Hayyim* book of the Kabbalah, manuscript copied out by Dov ben Ḥayyim, Galicia, 1780. National Library, Jerusalem
14. Carved beam, ancient Capernaum synagogue
15. Carved beam, ancient Capernaum synagogue
16. Page from illuminated Barcelona Haggadah, manuscript on vellum, 27.5 × 18 cm, Spain, 14th century. British Museum, London
17. Northern section of Ḥodorov synagogue ceiling, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
18. Ḥanukkah *menorah*, Egypt, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
19. Ḥanukkah *menorah*, silver, Ukraine, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
20. Coin from period of Bar Kokhba Revolt, 132-135 C.E.
21. Torah alcove at Dura Europos synagogue, 3rd century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
22. The Binding of Isaac, section of floor mosaic, Bet Alpha synagogue, 6th century
23. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, 19th century
24. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, 19th century
25. Relics of ancient Canaanite ritual objects, Hazor, 14th-13th centuries B.C.E., Israel Museum, Jerusalem
26. *Ḥamsa*, part of lamp to be hung in synagogue, brass, 16 × 23 cm, Morocco. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
27. *Ḥamsa*, part of lamp to be hung in synagogue, Morocco. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
28. Paper cut, Morocco, 19th century or early 20th century. Heikhal Shlomo, Jerusalem
29. Tree of *Sefirot*, illustration from manuscript of *Pardes Rimmonim* book of the Kabbalah by Rabbi Cordovero, parchment, Italy, 16th century. National Library, Jerusalem
30. Ḥanukkah *menorah*, Baghdad, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
31. Sign, part of the triptych *At the Gates of Jerusalem,* by Mordechai Ardon, oil on canvas, 194 × 129.8 cm, 1967. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

32. Apotropaic amulet, parchment, Palestine, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
33. Illustration from *Birds' Head Haggadah*, Germany, 1300. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
34. Burial of the Synagogue, detail from a manuscript, 15th century, National Library, Paris
35. The *Synagoga*, personification of Judaism, sculpture from Treyer Cathedral, Germany, 13th century
36. Title page of Passover Haggadah, Amsterdam, 1695
37. Tree of *Sefirot*, illustration from the *Sha'ar Shamayyim* book of the Kabbalah, drawn by B. Godins, Amsterdam, 1675. National Library, Jerusalem
38. Torah breastplate, Silver, partly gilt, Bohemia, late 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
39. Torah breastplate, Austria, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
40. Medallion marking the granting of rights to Austrian Jewry by Franz Joseph I, 1860. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
41. Medallion marking the granting of rights to Austrian Jewry by Franz Joseph I, 1860. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
42. Heidenheim synagogue, Germany, 19th century
43. Torah breastplate, Bohemia or Moravia, late 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
44. Ḥanukkah *menorah*, Galicia, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
45. Portal of ancient Baram synagogue
46. Carved basalt beam, Chorazin synagogue, 3rd century
47. Page from Passover Haggadah, Italy, 1769
48. Upper section of holy ark, Olkieniki synagogue, Poland, 18th century
49. Carving on ossuary, Bet She'arim, 3rd century
50. Section of floor mosaic at Hammath Tiberias synagogue, 4th century
51. *Menorah*, ram's horn, incense bowl, palm branch from floor mosaic at Hammath Tiberias synagogue, 4th century
52. Relief from Ashkelon synagogue, 7th century
53. Relief from Priene synagogue, 3rd century, Asia Minor
54. Floor mosaic, Bet She'an synagogue, 6th century
55. Torah mantel, Germany, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
56. Paper cut, 47 × 62 cm, North Africa, 19th century or early 20th century. Museum of Jewish Art, Paris
57. Illustration for Pentateuch, Yemen, 1469. British Museum, London
58. Amulet, North Africa, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
59. Detail of Hodorov synagogue ceiling, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
60. Southern section of painted ceiling at Hodorov synagogue, 17th century, Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
61. Lion and unicorn painted on wooden crate, Russia, 17th century
62. Rug from *The Lady and the Unicorn* series, France, 16th century
63. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv

64. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
65. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, Ukraine, 19th century
66. Center of painted ceiling, Hodorov synagogue, 17th century.
67. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
68. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
69. Drawing based on carved design on tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Romania
70. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, Ukraine
71. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, Ukraine
72. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
73. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
74. Drawing of floor mosaic at Ma'on synagogue, 6th century
75. Wall painting at wooden synagogue, Gwozdziec, Poland, 17th century
76. Detail from floor mosaic at Ma'on synagogue, 6th century
77. Detail from floor mosaic at Ma'on synagogue, 6th century
78. Lintel of main entrance to Gush Halav synagogue, 3rd century
79. Central detail from front of Chorazin synagogue, 3rd century
80-82. Illustrations for *Etz Hayyim* book of the Kabbalah, Galicia, 1780. National Library, Jerusalem
83. Entrance to Jewish home at Hara Kebira, Djerba, North Africa
84-85. Drawing of details from plate 86
86. Section of ceiling painting at wooden synagogue, Gwozdziec, Poland, 17th century
87-88. Drawing of details from plate 89
89. Section of ceiling painting at wooden synagogue, Gwozdziec, Poland, 17th century
90. Wall painting at wooden synagogue, Mohilev, Russia, 18th century
91. Drawing based on a Hebrew manuscript from France, 13th century
92. Floor mosaic, Hammam-Lif synagogue, North Africa, 5th century
93. Tombstones at Jewish cemetery at Zydowice, Poland
94. Gold-decorated glass found at Jewish burial site, diameter 9 cm, Italy, 4th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
95. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, Ukraine
96. Detail from plate 97
97. Torah crown, Silver, partly gilt, Poland 1815. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
98. *Mizraḥ*, paper cut, 34 × 43 cm, Poland, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
99. *Mizraḥ*, paper cut, 42 × 54.5 cm, Jassy, Romania, 1846. Museum of Art, Ein Harod
100. Hanukkah *menorah*, brass, Poland, 18th century, Israel Museum, Jerusalem
101. Hanukkah *menorah*, Eastern Europe, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

102. Curtain for holy ark, Germany, 1725. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
103. Torah breastplate, silver, partly gilt, precious stones, Germany, late 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
104. Illustration to *Etz Hayyim* book of the Kabbalah, Galicia, 1780. National Library, Jerusalem
105. Torah breastplate, silver, partly gilt, Germany, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
106. Torah crown, Poland, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
107. Torah crown, Poland, 1807. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
108. Printer's mark of Zvi ben Avraham Kalonymus Joffe, Lublin, 17th century
109. Hanukkah *menorah*, Bohemia, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
110. Imaginary drawing of Temple. Appeared in several editions of Hebrew books
111. Printer's mark of S. ha-Cohen and M. ha-Cohen, Prague, 1593-1597
112. Printer's mark of the Foa Family, Venice, 18th century
113. Printer's mark of Giorgio di Cavalo, Venice, 16th century
114. Hebrew printers' mark, Prague, 1512
115. Amulet for protecting woman at childbirth, parchment, color ornamentation, 9 × 12 cm, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
116. Synagogue, Berlin, 19th century
117. Proposed design for Regensburg synagogue, early 20th century
118. Hanukkah *menorah*, brass, Holland, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
119. Torah breastplate, silver, partly gilt, Turkey, 20th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
120. Hanukkah *menorah*, Morocco, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
121. Hanukkah *menorah*, brass, Morocco, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
122. Torah breastplate, silver, Turkey, 1915. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
123. Hanukkah *menorah*, India, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
124. Nameplate of the "Die Welt" newspaper, founded by Herzl in 1897
125. Nameplate of the "Die Welt" newspaper which became the organ of the Zionist movement, 1907
126. Bookplate (ex-libris) created by E.M. Lilien for the Jüedischer Verlag, Berlin. Tel Aviv Museum
127. Bookplate created by E.M. Lilien. Tel Aviv Museum
128. Bookplate of painter E.M. Lilien. Tel Aviv Museum
129. Bookplate of Martin Buber created by E.M. Lilien. Tel Aviv Museum
130. Emblem of the Arab "Liberation Army"
131. Survivors of the Nazi extermination camps on their way to Palestine
132. Entrance doors of the Bezalel National Museum, 1925. Artists' Association, Jerusalem
133. Jewish National Fund Golden Book, 1913, created by Meir Gur-Arieh, a Bezalel artist. Jewish National Fund collection, Jerusalem
134-143. Drafts for the mosaics of the synagogue at Essen, Germany, 1913

144. Lithograph in the *The Creation* series by Mordechai Ardon, detail, 1981. Bineth Gallery, Tel Aviv
145. Lithograph in the *The Creation* series by Mordechai Ardon, 1981. Bineth Gallery, Tel Aviv
146. *Alphabet*, drawing by Ben Shahn, 1954
147. *The Alphabet of Creation*, by Ben Shahn, silkscreen, 77 × 57 cm, 1957. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
148. *Scrolls of Canaan*, part of a triptych by Moshe Castel, 1964. Tel Aviv Museum
149. *New Immigrant Kissing the Earth*, oil painting by Naftali Bezem, 129 × 129 cm., 1970. Tel Aviv Museum
150. *Prometheus*, sketch in bronze by Jacques Lipchitz, 11 × 23 cm, 1931. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
151. *Prometheus*, sketch in bronze by Jacques Lipchitz, 19 × 22 cm, 1936. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
152. *David and Goliath*, sketch in bronze by Jacques Lipchitz, 27.5 × 27 cm, 1933. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
153. *Fire and Water*, moving sculpture by Yaakov Agam, 1972. From the artist's collection
154. *Transformation and Fusion*, by Yaakov Agam, silkscreen, 56.5 × 57.5 cm, 1970. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
155. *Solitude* by Marc Chagall, oil on canvas. 111 × 168 cm, 1933. Tel Aviv Museum
156. *Long-Suffering Fish,* Lithography by Naftali Bezem, 65 × 50 cm. Tel-Aviv Museum
157. *The Mother*, a sculpture in bronze by Jacques Lipchitz, 1941–42. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
158. Detail from *The Mother*, sculpture by Jacques Lipchitz, 1941-1942. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
159. *The White Crucifixion* by Marc Chagall, oil on canvas, 155 × 140 cm, 1938. The Art Institute of Chicago

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Plates

1

Celestial bodies — the sun and moon in particular — were objects of worship and apotheosis in the ancient Middle East (pl. 1). This Babylonian relief depicts the sun-god in his Holy of Holies with the symbol of the sun before him. The circles above represent the moon and stars.

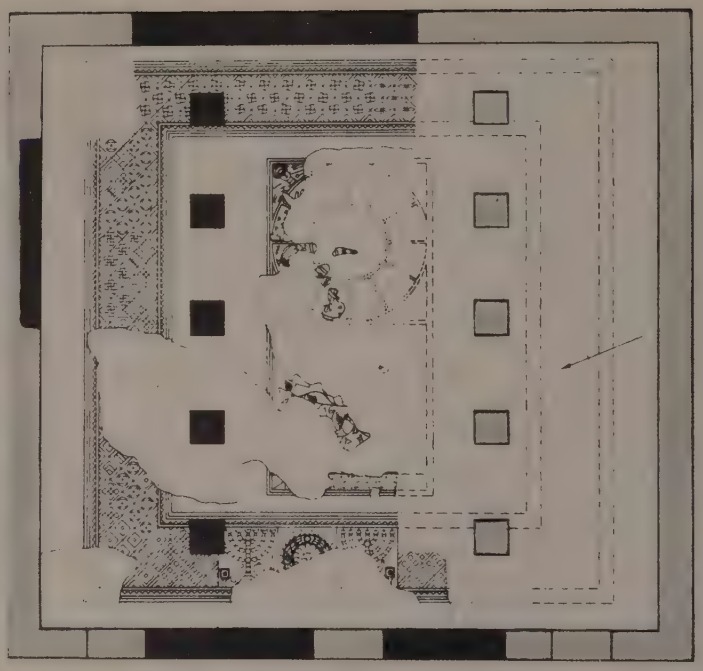
1. *The Sun God*, Babylonian relief, 9th century B.C.E.

Circles containing shapes of rosettes and stars were a common motif in Jewish art. These shapes were sometimes figurative, influenced by myths of the surrounding civilizations (pl. 6). The ossuaries were often embellished with carvings of the Tree of Life or cosmic pillar with a circle on either side. This configuration of motifs reinforced the symbolic significance of the circles, which came to represent a bridge between life and death, between the earthly and the celestial.

The circle is a central symbol in several of the ancient synagogue floor mosaics. At times, it gave way to the zodiac (pl. 2, 7, 8, 9, 12).

2. Floor plan of Ḥusifah synagogue, 5th century
3. Floor plan of Japhia synagogue, 4th century
4. Stone ossuary, Jerusalem, 1st century B.C.E. — 1st century C.E.
5. Detail of carved stone beam, Chorazin synagogue
6. Detail of carved stone beam, Chorazin synagogue

next page:
7. Zodiac and seasons, central detail of the floor mosaic in the Bet Alpha synagogue, 6th century
8. Floor mosaic of Bet Alpha synagogue, 6th century



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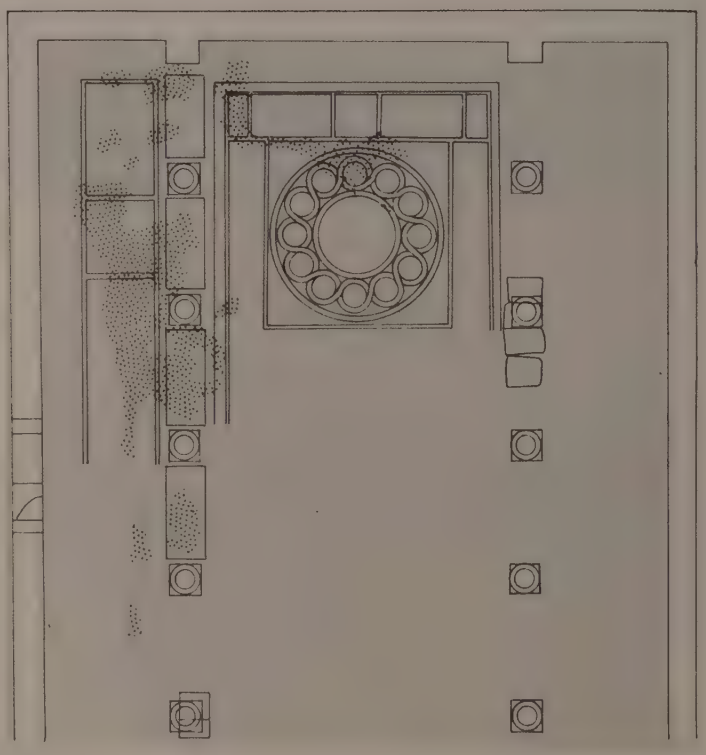

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4

5

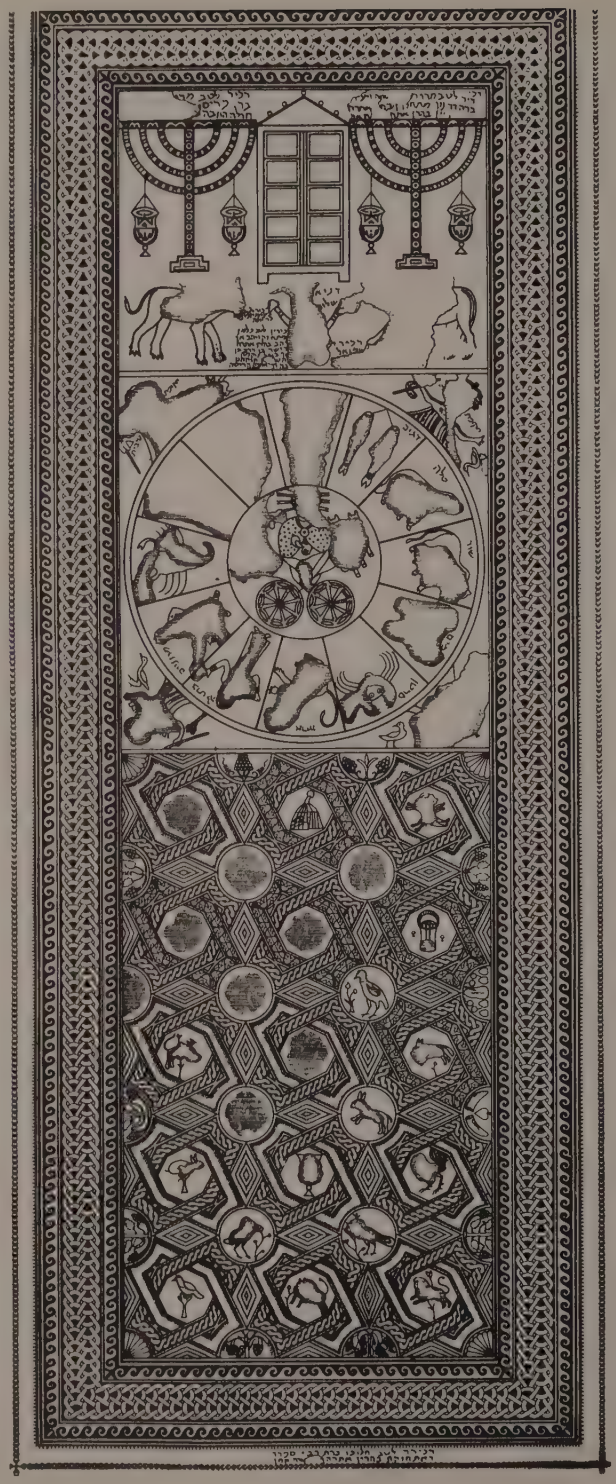
6

אברהם
יצחק
MNICΦOYCINVTE
XNITEVKAMNON
TECTWEPTONTOV
TWMAPIΔNOCK41
ΔHINAC VOC

"When the building of the shrine had been completed, they prepared to sacrifice twelve oxen as against the twelve tribes and the twelve lights."
(Numbers Rabbah 12)

The floor mosaic of the Naaran synagogue (pl. 9) includes three principal parts: animals, a zodiac and a holy ark situated between two *menorahs* with lions reclining beside them. The mosaic as a whole symbolizes the elements of the Creation. In an ambivalent way it also stands for the destroyed Temple which, in turn, symbolizes rebirth and redemption.
The elements of Creation include the flora and fauna, the life cycle and the heavenly bodies, represented by the zodiac and the seasons. According to ancient faiths, the *menorahs* alongside the gate represent the seven days and the integrity and balance of the heavenly bodies. The gate and *menorahs* stand for the Temple and the ritual objects inside it. The twelve signs may represent the twelve tribes, the twelve stones of the High Priest's breastplate, the twelve loaves of the shew-bread and the twelve bulls in the Temple. The animals and plants in the third section of the mosaic symbolize the luxuriance of the Garden of Eden and, through it, the concept of redemption.

9. Drawing of floor mosaic at Naaran synagogue, 6th century
10. Carved stone door of ancient tomb, Kfar Yassif



9

10

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork." (*Psalms 19:2*)

11

The floor mosaic of the Christian monastery represents a different kind of symbolism (pl. 11).It includes twelve figures representing the twelve months. The two in the center symbolize the sun and the moon, as well as Jesus and Maria.

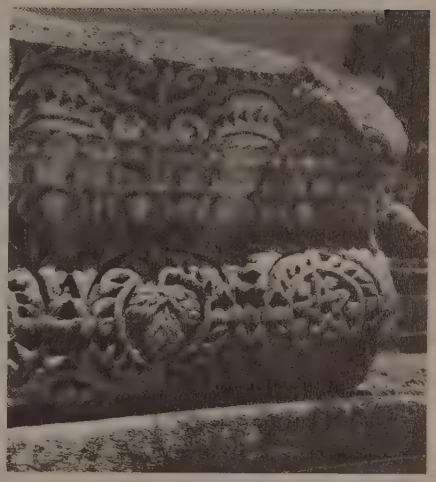
11. Central section of floor mosaic, Kyria-Maria Monastery, Bet Shean, 6th century
12. Floor mosaic of Hammath Tiberias synagogue, 4th century

The lintels of the ancient synagogue of Capernaum synagogue include carvings of round shapes containing flowers or five- or six-point stars (pl. 14, 15). The circle is an abstract, universal symbol which provides a feeling of oneness with nature and God, so that its popularity in Jewish art throughout the ages on different ritual objects comes as no surprise (pl. 13, 16, 18, 19).

In this painting (pl. 13) the circles appearing one inside the other symbolize the steps linking the upper and lower worlds according to Kabbalistic allusions. The path cutting through them symbolizes the first man.

13. Illustration from the *Etz Hayyim* book of the Kabbalah, manuscript copied out by Dov ben Hayyim, Galicia, 1780. National Library, Jerusalem
14. Carved beam, ancient Capernaum synagogue
15. Carved beam, ancient Capernaum synagogue

14



15

"And Thou hast created Heaven and earth and in the Heavens Thou hast created the sun and moon and stars and constellations and on earth trees and grass and the Garden of Eden and beasts and fowl and fish and human beings, so that those in the upper world may know the ways of the upper world and the ways of the lower one and how the upper and lower may be told apart."
(Tikunei Zohar, Second Prologue)

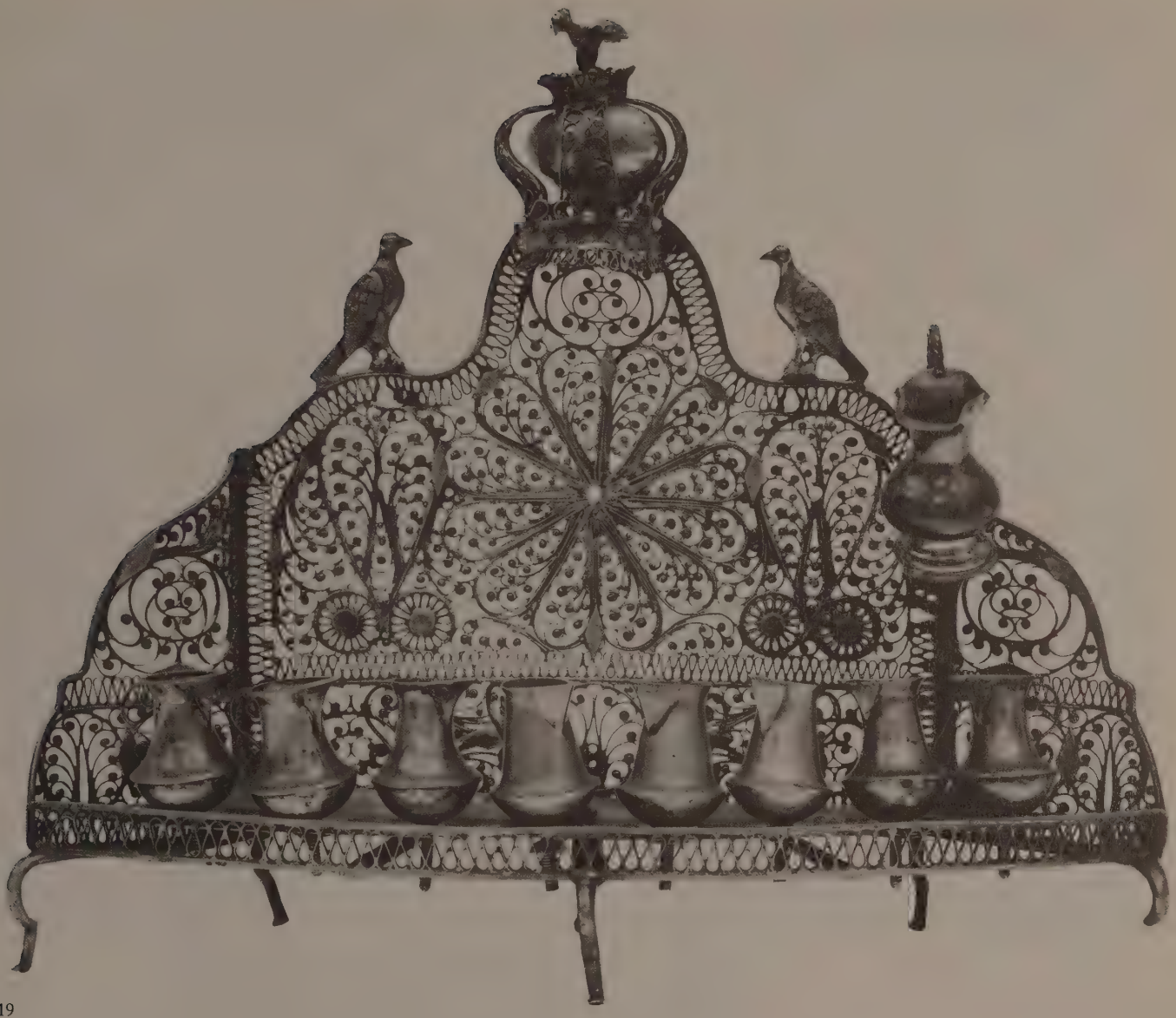
The Kabbalah and its symbols have lent artistic motifs their cosmic intensity. In medieval Passover Haggadahs, the *matzah* was often painted as a circle containing a rosette or a star. In pl. 16, the words "Matzah Zo" ("This Matzah") appear above the round shape in the middle, and the four corners symbolize the four winds.

16. Page from illuminated Barcelona Haggadah, manuscript, Spain, 14th century. British Museum, London
17. Northern section of Ḥodorov synagogue ceiling, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv

17

18

18. Ḥanukkah *menorah*, Egypt, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
19. Ḥanukkah *menorah*, Ukraine, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem



19

A gateway and pillars representing the Temple appear on a coin dating from the period of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. This is an early example of a symbol which struck roots in Jewish art (pl. 20). The alcove for the Torah in the Dura Europos synagogue was designed as a gateway and pillars, with the conch above. Directly over it was a painting of the Temple similar in shape to that on the coin. Alongside it is a painting of the Binding of Isaac (pl. 21).

The symbolism at hand here is based on the relationship among three elements
1. The relationship between man and God
2. Remembrance of the Destruction and the idea of redemption
3. The Torah and its existential role.

The traditional site of the Binding of Isaac is Mount Moriah, site of the Temple. Thus, the Binding also symbolized the readiness to sacrifice, the covenant between a people and its God and the bond of the Jewish people to the Temple. The floor mosaic at the Bet Alpha synagogue also stresses the covenant through the hand reaching out from Heaven (pl. 22).

20. Coin from period of Bar Kokhba Revolt, 132-135 C.E.
21. Torah alcove at Dura Europos synagogue, 3rd century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
22. The Binding of Isaac, section of floor mosaic, Bet Alpha synagogue, 6th century

20

21

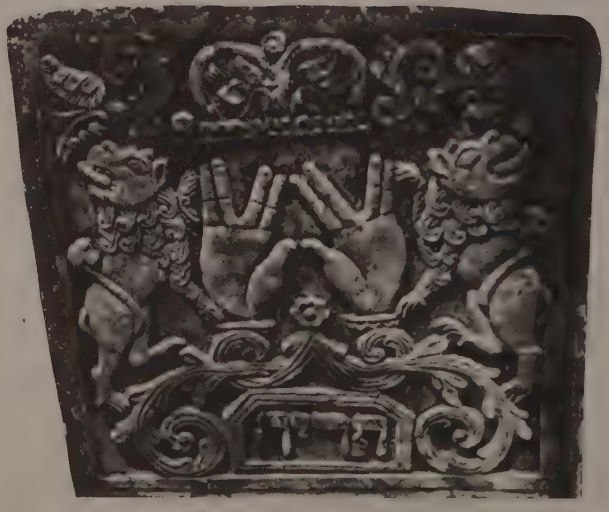
אברהם
יצחק

In many different civilizations, far removed from one another and influenced by different religious beliefs, one finds representations of hands directed at shining or cosmic bodies. This is essentially a way of drawing attention to the complex relationship between man and powers beyond his reach, between the microcosm and the macrocosm. This motif was carved on one of the relics of the ancient Canaanite ritual for moon worship (pl. 25).

The motif of hands reaching for the light or the crown, symbolizing the earthly and the celestial is widespread in Jewish art. In many cases, the palms symbolize the priestly benediction (pl. 24) or the benediction over the candles (pl. 23).

23. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, 19th century
24. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, 19th century
25. Relics of ancient Canaanite ritual objects, Hazor, 14th-13th centuries B.C.E., Israel Museum, Jerusalem

23



24

25

26

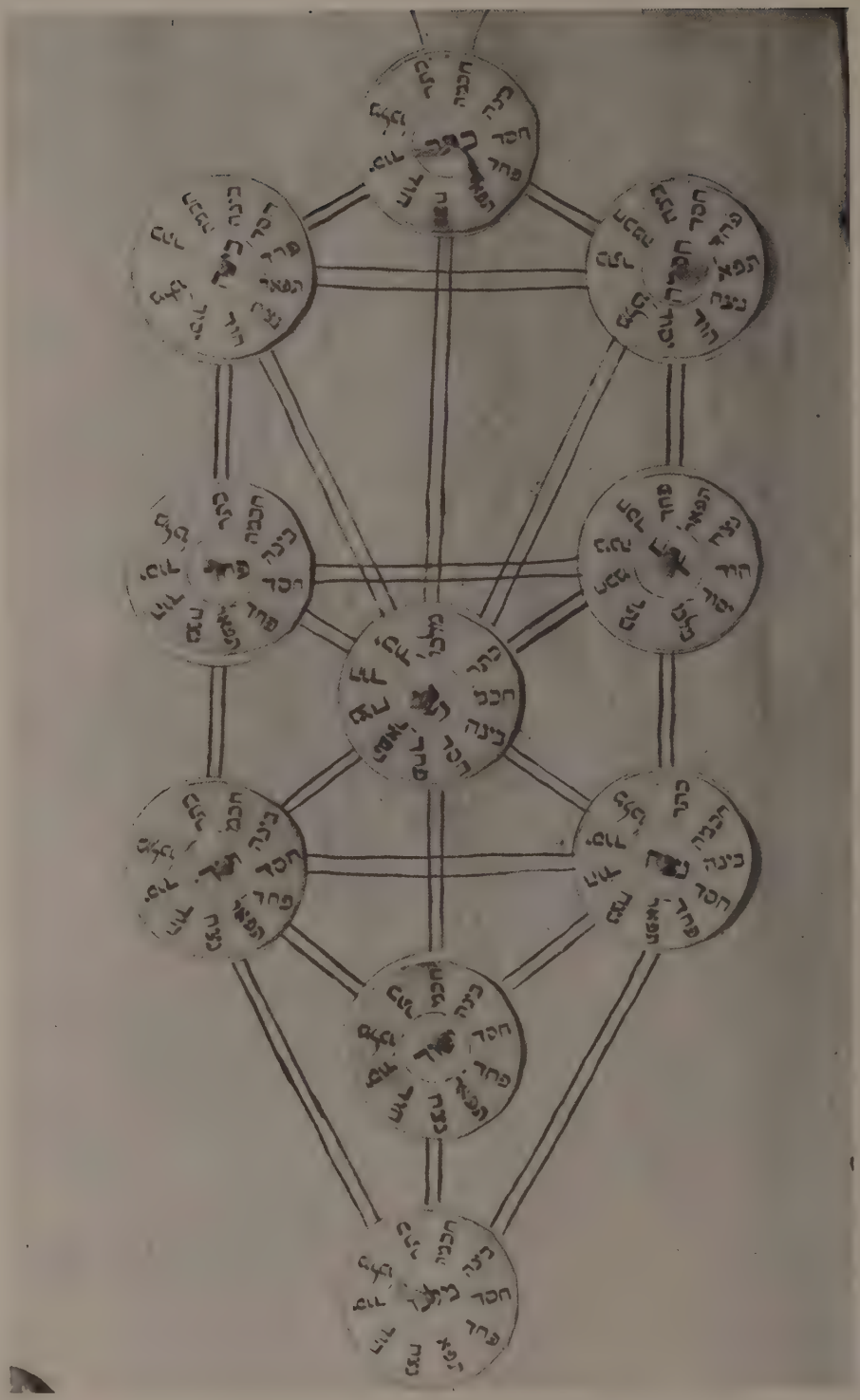
27

In the synagogues of North Africa there was a custom of hanging the palm-shaped *Hamsa* embellished with circles, rosettes or stars and connected to the chandelier (pl. 26, 27). The configuration of lamp and palm was also common in paper cuts (pl. 28). Pl. 30 is a typical example of the use of the palm motif for embellishing the Hanukkah *menorah*. It was also used at times on amulets for magical purposes (pl. 32).

26. *Ḥamsa*, part of lamp to be hung in synagogue, Morocco. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
27. *Ḥamsa*, part of lamp to be hung in synagogue, Morocco. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
28. Paper cut, Morocco, 19th century or early 20th century. Heikhal Shlomo, Jerusalem

השמים ומשכני הארץ ורגע הם ותירוש יתם

"Thou (God) hast created the ten Restorations which we call the ten Sefirot *with which to conduct worlds unknown." (Tikunei Zohar, Second Prologue)*



The Tree of *Sefirot*, that symbolic and graphic representation of the divine workings, as the Kabbalists saw it, was depicted in an unusual manner on this parchment (pl. 29). The circles stand for the ten *Sefirot*, connected to the parchment in a way which makes it possible to turn them, so as to stress the dynamics of these abstract images.

29. Tree of *Sefirot*, illustration from manuscript of *Pardes Rimmonim* book of the Kabbalah written by Rabbi Cordovero, Italy, 16th century. National Library, Jerusalem
30. Ḥanukkah *menorah*, Baghdad, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
31. Sign, part of the triptych *At the Gates of Jerusalem,* by Mordechai Ardon, oil on canvas, 1967. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
32. Apotropaic amulet, Palestine, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

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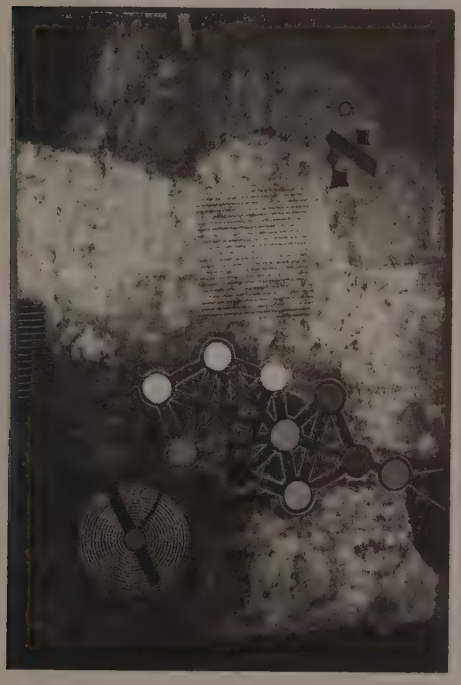

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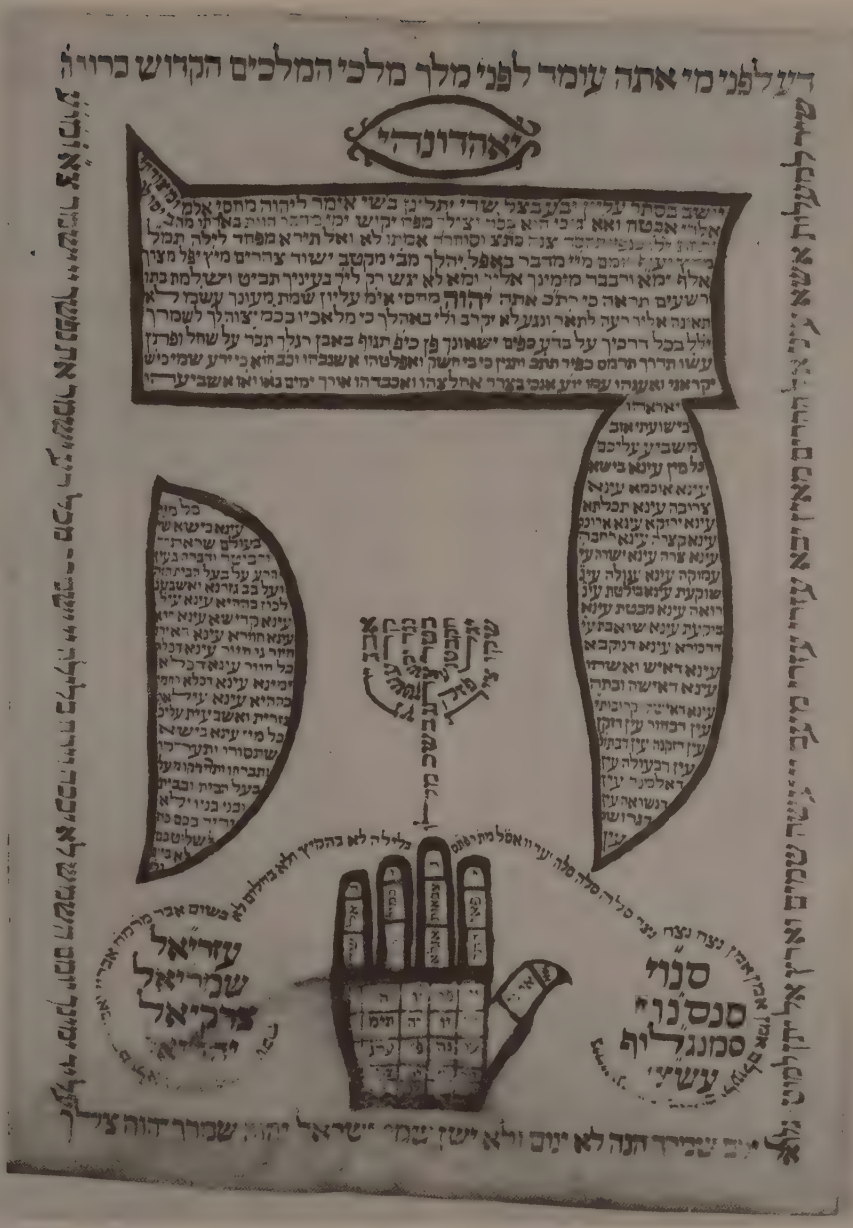
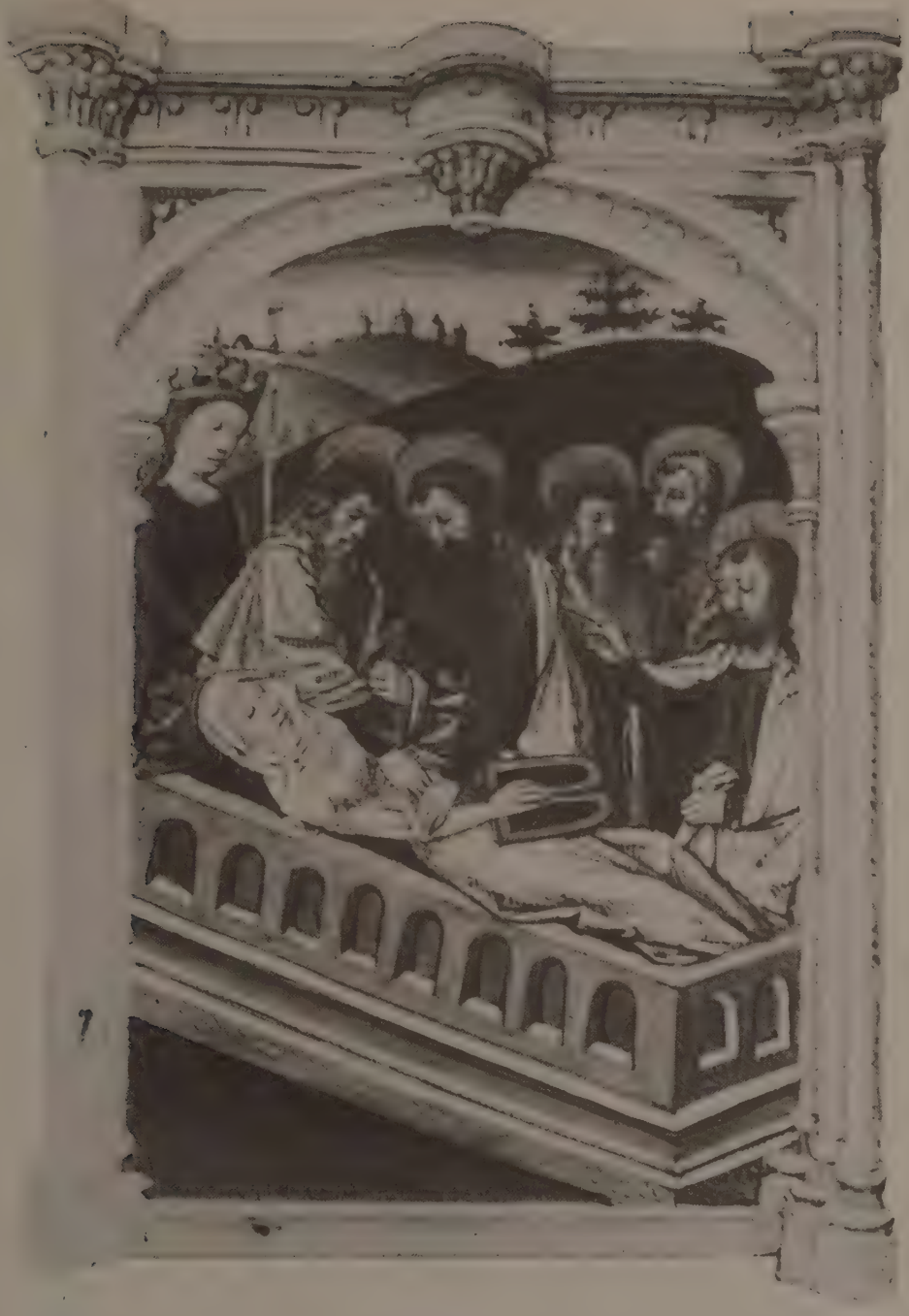

לפני מי אתה עומד לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא
אהדונה
עזריאל
שמריאל
מריאל
סנוי
סנסנוי
סמנגלוף

32

The motif of the Tablets, shaped as two arched sections connected to one another, was initially developed in Christian art. During the Middle Ages, the Tablets appear in the hands of the *Synagoga* — the personification of Judaism in Christian art — in painting (pl. 34), sculpture (pl. 35) and stained glass windows. Tablets were often depicted upside down, to indicate the inability of Judaism to grasp the allusions ingrained in its own teachings. The Tablet shape was also adopted during the same period into Jewish books, especially to illustrate the Revelation at Mount Sinai (pl. 33). The Torah is shown as it is handed down to the people in five tablets.

33. Illustration from *Birds' Head Haggadah*, Germany, 1300. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
34. Burial of the Synagogue, detail from a manuscript, 15th century, National Library, Paris
35. The *Synagoga*, personification of Judaism, sculpture from Treyer Cathedral, Germany, 13th century

33



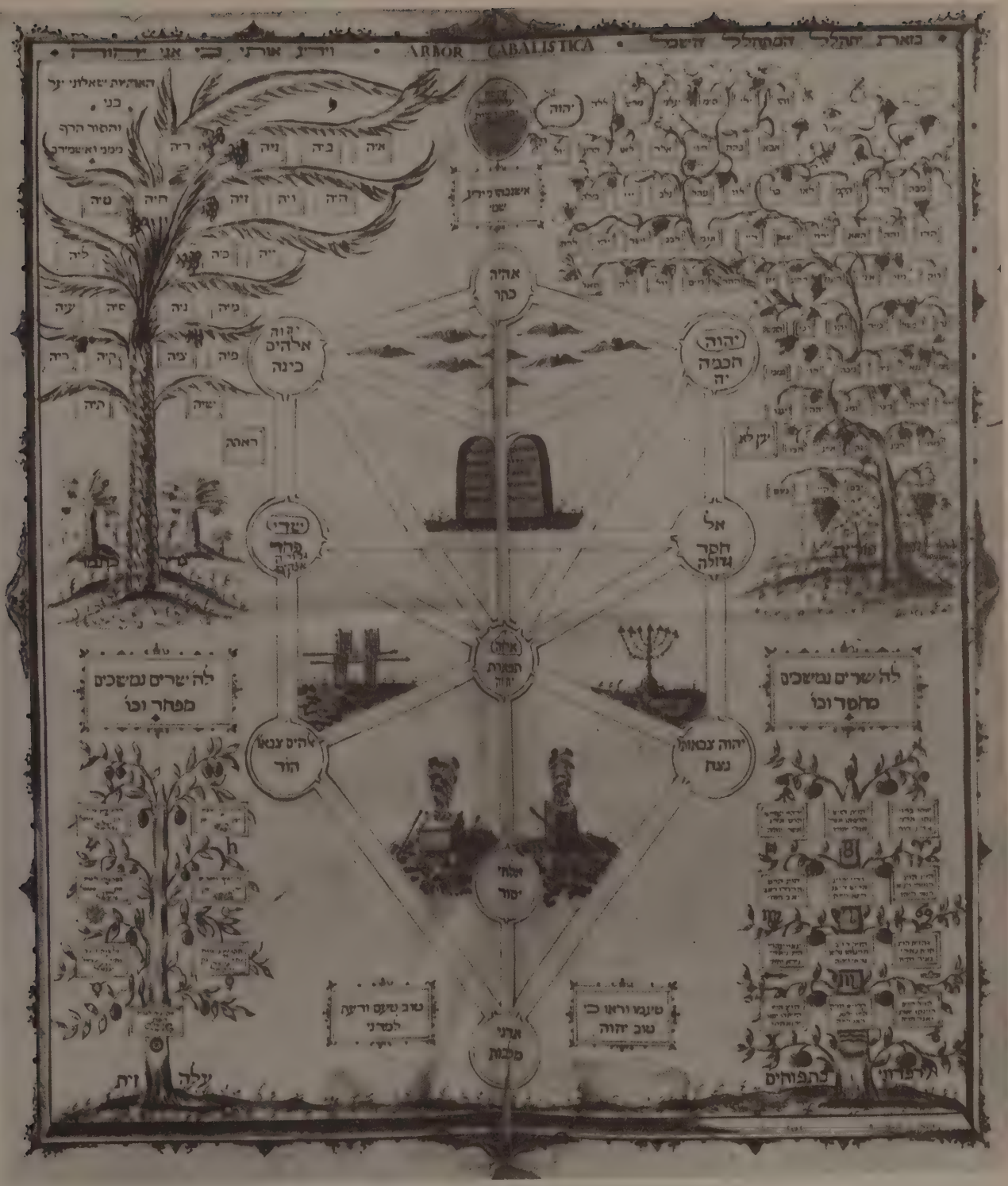
34

35

36

Ever since the sixteenth century, the tablets have become a general symbol of the Torah in Jewish art. As a result of the Kabbalistic influence towards regarding the Torah as a symbol, the Tablets were incorporated into the Tree of *Sefirot* (pl. 37). This painting represents the meeting between motifs and symbols taken from Jewish tradition and those of Christian art, such as the Tablets and the angels.

36. Title page of Passover Haggadah, Amsterdam, 1695
37. Tree of *Sefirot*, illustration from the *Sha'ar Shamayyim* book of the Kabbalah, drawn by B. Godins, Amsterdam, 1675. National Library, Jerusalem


ARBOR CABALISTICA
אהיה כתר
יהוה חכמה יה
יקוק אלהים בינה
אל חסד גדולה
אלהים תפארת יהוה
יהוה צבאות נצח
אלהי ישראל יסוד
אדני מלכות
להי צבאות הוד
לה ישרים עושים מפחד וכו׳
לה ישרים עושים מחסד וכו׳
שוב עשיו ורעה למדיני
טיעמו וראו כי טוב יהוה
בתפוחים

38

The depiction of Moses and the Tablets in his hands as a characterization resembles the depictions of saints at the entrance to Christian cathedrals. This motif has been common in the title pages of Jewish books (pl. 36) and ritual objects (pl. 38) since the 16th century.

38. Torah breastplate, Bohemia, late 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
39. Torah breastplate, Austria, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The Tablets were an especially widespread motif in the 19th century. They appeared on the facades of synagogues (pl. 42), in a central position on holy arks and on ritual objects as well (pl. 39, 43). The Tablets came to symbolize Judaism and the Torah for Jews and non-Jews alike.

A medallion issued to mark the granting of rights to the Jews included the Tablets in the background, coupled with such symbols as the cornucopia and the wreath of triumph (pl. 40-41).

40

41

40. Medallion marking the granting of rights to Austrian Jewry by Franz Joseph I, 1860. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
41. Medallion marking the granting of rights to Austrian Jewry by Franz Joseph I, 1860. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
42. Heidenheim synagogue, Germany, 19th century

43

43. Torah breastplate, Bohemia or Moravia, late 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
44. Ḥanukkah *menorah*, Galicia, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Ever since ancient times, the gateway and pillars motif has symbolized the transition from the secular to the sacred, from life to death and from the world of matter to the world of the spirit (pl. 45, 46, 49, 50) as well as the destroyed Temple.

This motif grew increasingly vital and took on mystical and cosmic symbolism of great intensity as a result of Kabbalistic influences (pl. 47, 48, 80, 81).

45. Portal of ancient Baram synagogue
46. Carved basalt beam, Chorazin synagogue, 3rd century
47. Page from Passover Haggadah, Italy, 1769
48. Upper section of holy ark, Olkieniki synagogue, Poland, 18th century
49. Carving on ossuary, Bet She'arim, 3rd century

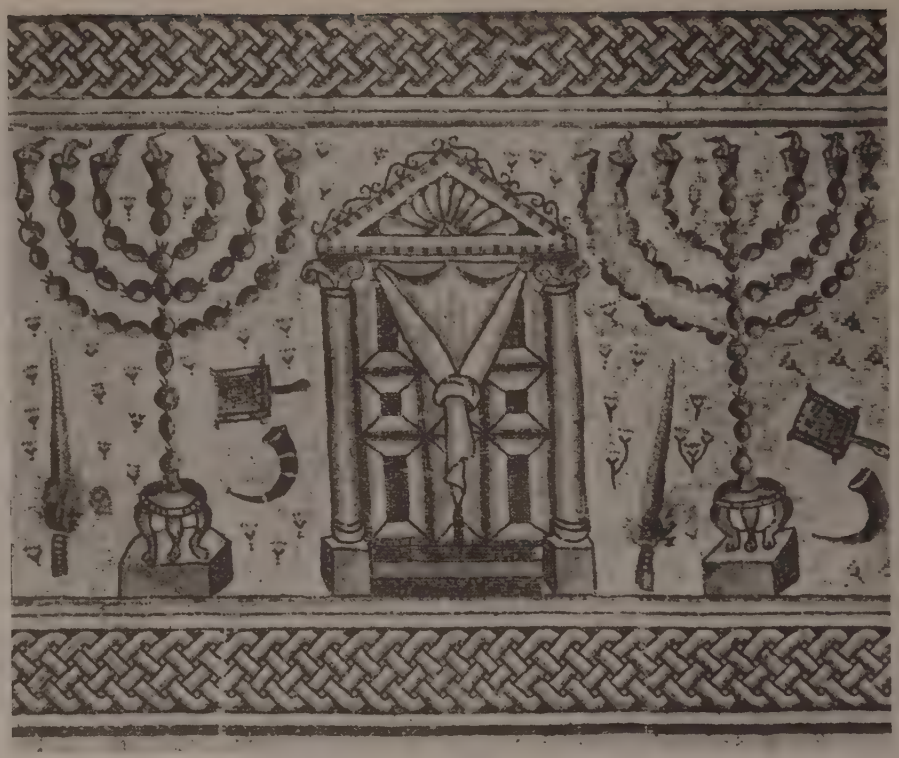
45

46

47

48

49



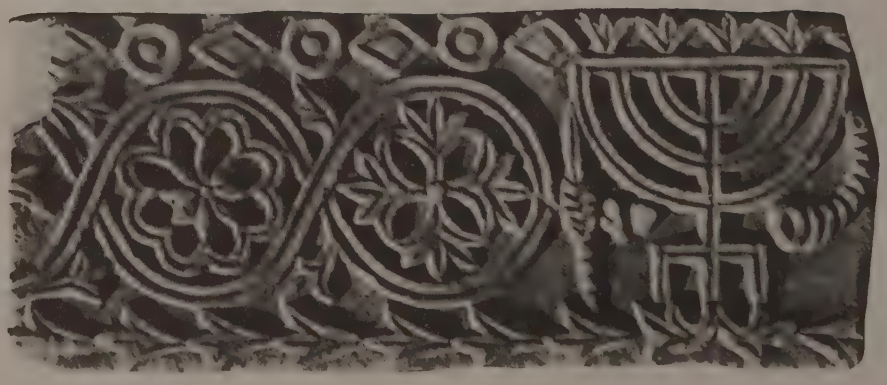
50

Ever since ancient times, the seven-branched *menorah* has had a central role in Jewish art. In many synagogues it was depicted alongside the gate and pillars (pl. 50, 54, 56) and near the ark with the Torah scroll (pl. 55).

50. Section of floor mosaic at Hammath Tiberias synagogue, 4th century
51. *Menorah*, ram's horn, incense bowl, palm branch from floor mosaic at Hammath Tiberias synagogue, 4th century

"Its seven candles against the seven stars which serve the world." (*Yalkut Shimoni, Exodus 419*)

52



53

52. Relief from Ashkelon synagogue, 7th century
53. Relief from Priene synagogue, 3rd century, Asia Minor
54. Floor mosaic, Bet She'an synagogue, 6th century

54

55

55. Torah mantle, Germany, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
56. Paper cut, North Africa, 19th century or early 20th century. Museum of Jewish Art, Paris

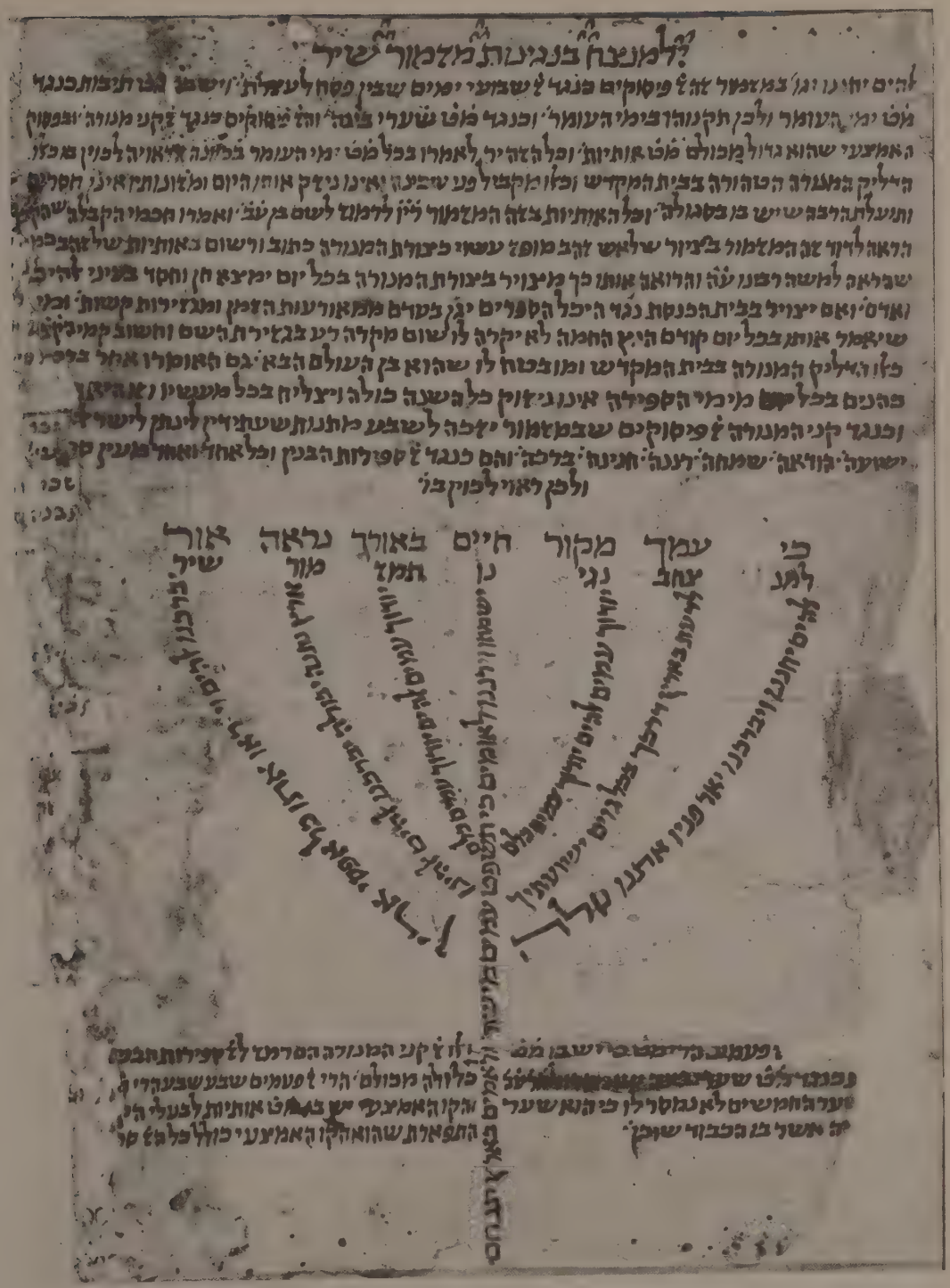
56

The *menorah*, which had been a ritual object in the Temple developed into a national and religious symbol which was to accompany the Jewish people and express messianic longings. Its shape, the number of branches and its lights were all seen as symbols which often bore mystical, and even magical, meanings.

Jewish paintings in both the East and the West, often included symbols consisting of tiny words and letters, called micrographics. They were also used to decorate Hebrew manuscripts (pl. 57) and amulets (pl. 58). The written word thus enhanced the symbolic use of circles, rosettes, *menorahs* and fish.

57. Illustration for Pentateuch, Yemen, 1469. British Museum, London
58. Amulet, North Africa, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

57



"But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of a wild ox." (Psalms 32:11)

"All of the stars and lights in the Heaven above exist in order to conduct the world below it. It is from there that the grades (madregot) *spread until they sustain the stars below, as they are not sustained on their own at all, as we have already indicated, but are sustained by the Almighty One above."* (The Zohar, Part 2)

59

Jewish legends tell of meetings between the lion and the wild ox, each of which is said to have super-human strength, enabling them to perform divinely-inspired miracles. The legends take on a messianic dimension as well when King David is also introduced as a witness to these feats. The visual representations usually identify the wild ox with the unicorn. The Tree of Life appearing between them further enhances the messianic overtones of the portrayal.

59. Detail of Hodorov synagogue ceiling, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
60. Southern section of painted ceiling at Hodorov synagogue, 17th century, Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv

61

The lion and the unicorn both symbolize the monumental and hostile powers of the enemy, while also standing for honor, valor, divine power and self-restraint. For many different civilizations, lying far apart from one another, these two were united into a single symbol whose meanings were many. It was a symbol filled with tension and with a struggle between powerful yet restrained drives. Between the lion and the unicorn, intertwined in what might be either struggle or embrace, there was both a balance and a confrontation. In Christian art, the lion and unicorn motifs were sometimes linked with that of the Locked Garden and with the image of the Virgin.

61. Lion and unicorn painted on wooden crate, Russia, 17th century
62. Rug from *The Lady and the Unicorn* series, France, 16th century

62

63

Animals — both predators and their prey — represent the satanic forces in the universe. In the composition painted on the ceiling of the Ḥodorov synagogue (pl. 63, 64) they contrast with the two-headed eagle in the center (pl. 66), which the Kabbalah regards as a symbol of Providence and divine protection.

63. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
64. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv

"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings." (Deuteronomy 32:11)

"And when it (the Shekhinah*) descends it descends as an eagle which is the bird that fears no other bird in the world."*
"Who are his 'fledglings'? They are the people of Israel, who are as fledglings and they sing unto the Shekhinah *a few prayers and It descends unto them."*
(Tikunei Zohar)

65

65. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, Ukraine, 19th century
66. Center of painted ceiling, Hodorov synagogue, 17th century.

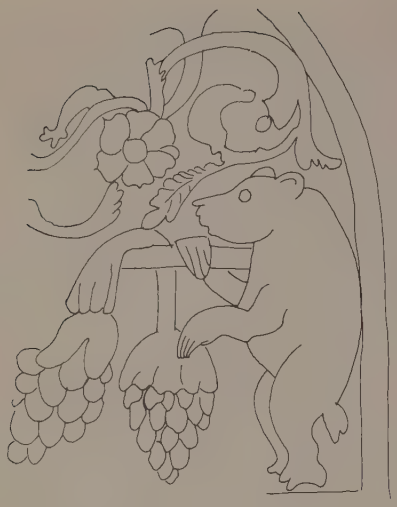
"And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together and the lion shall eat straw like the ox." (Isaiah 11:7)

67

The bear is a common symbol in Slavic folklore, from which it entered Jewish art, especially that of Eastern Europe. The bear searching for honey in the tree-tops was likened to a Jew in quest of the Torah, which is as sweet as honey. This accounts for the bear motifs appearing in synagogues (pl. 67), on ritual objects and on Jewish tombstones (pl. 69). The tranquil bear, with the Tree of Life growing either alongside it or from within it (pl. 68, 70) is a symbol of the hopes for redemption and the Messiah.

67. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
68. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv

ואמר מרוע באתי ואין איש קראתי ואין עונה וכחב



69

70

69. Drawing based on carved design on tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Romania
70. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, Ukraine
71. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, Ukraine

71

"All that which I created I created in pairs: Heaven and earth a pair, sun and moon a pair, Adam and Eve a pair. This world and the world to come a pair." (Song of Songs Rabbah)

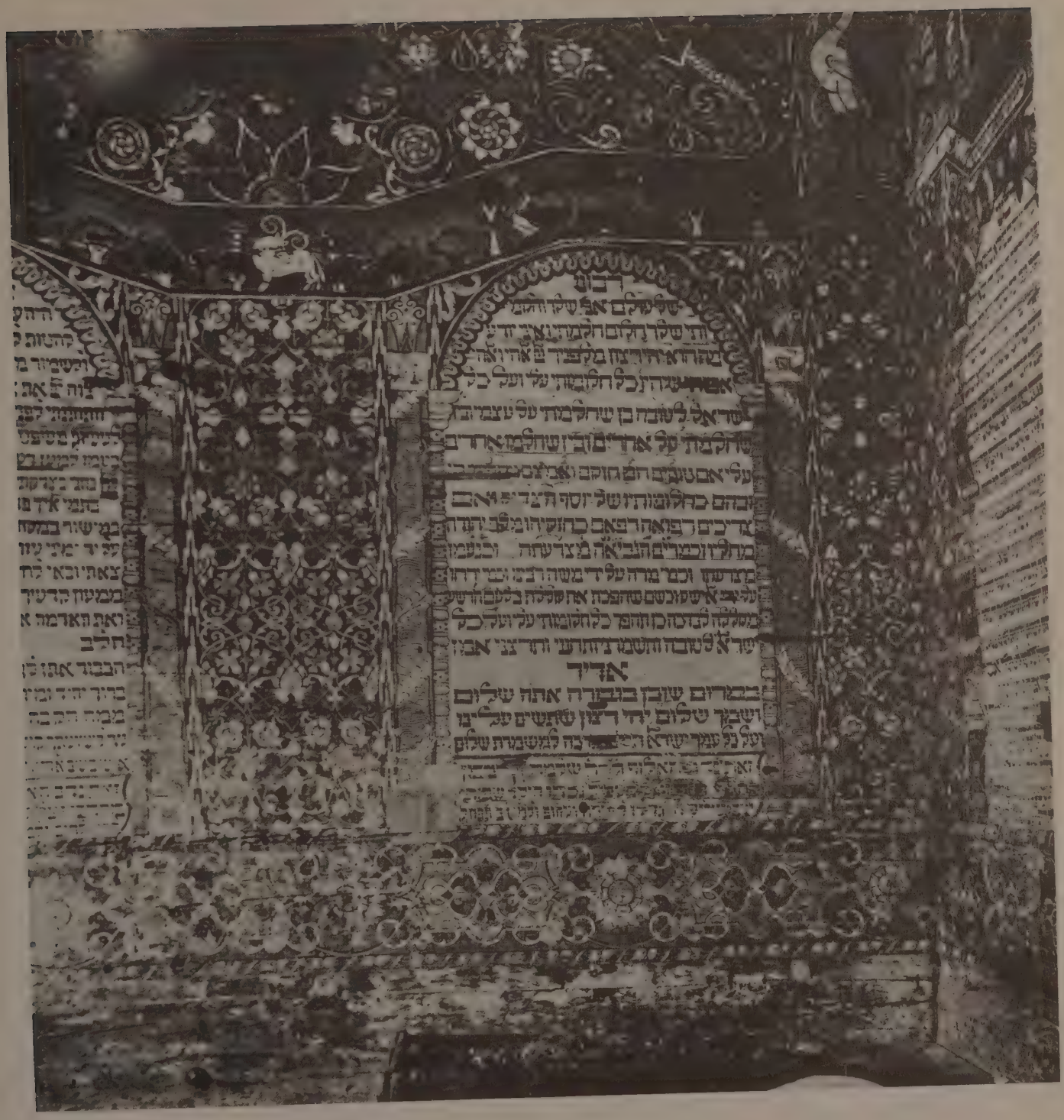
72

72. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv
73. Detail from ceiling of Hodorov synagogue, 17th century. Reconstruction at Beth Hatefutsoth Museum, Tel Aviv

ל קודך וכתוב מי בקש ואת מדרכם רמוס חצרי והשוב ח

The mosaic in the Ma'on synagogue includes pairs of animals standing for the abundance of creation. In the center is the seven-branched *menorah*, two lions and two palm trees. In ancient Jewish art, the Tree of Life was a palm tree. The trees and the birds alongside them stand for the Garden of Eden, while the *menorah* and lions are a symbol of the longings for redemption (pl. 74). A similar type of symbolism, albeit using a different composition of details, coupled with such messianic motifs as the leviathan and the legendary bull, is found in the mosaic of the Hammam-Lif synagogue (pl. 92).

74. Drawing of floor mosaic at Ma'on synagogue, 6th century
75. Wall painting at wooden synagogue, Gwozdziec, Poland, 17th century



76

77

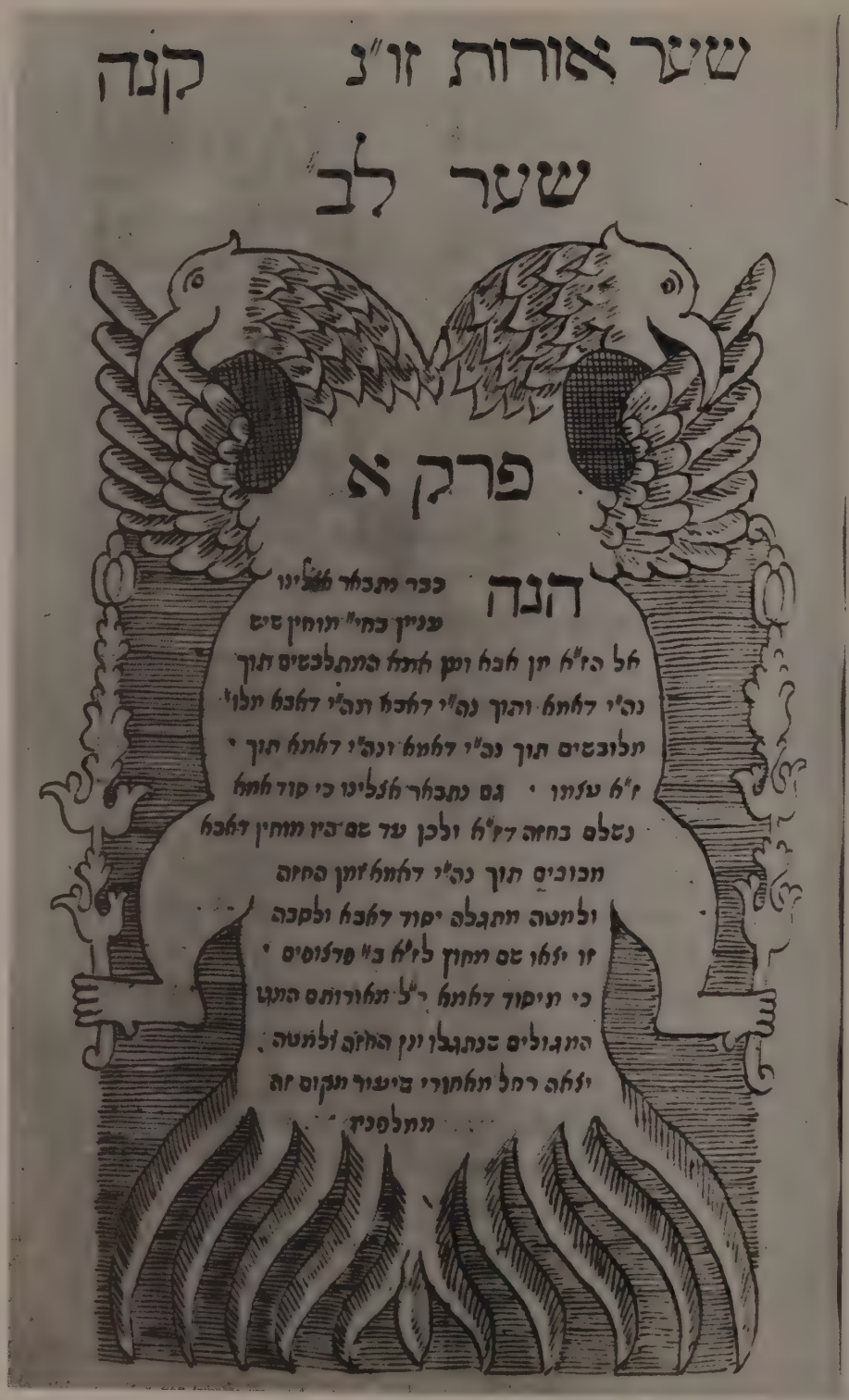
The eagle, symbol of divine protection and of the cosmic forces, appears above the entrance ways of the ancient synagogues (pl. 78, 79). The eagle motif was also widespread on ritual objects (pl. 97), paper cuts (pl. 98, 99) and Hebrew books (pl. 80, 81). The two heads of the eagle in pl. 80 may stress the dualism of divine protection. In pl. 81, the eagles are hovering over the mystical gate whose pillars are Trees of Life.

76. Detail from floor mosaic at Ma'on synagogue, 6th century
77. Detail from floor mosaic at Ma'on synagogue, 6th century
78. Lintel of main entrance to Gush Halav synagogue, 3rd century
79. Central detail from front of Chorazin synagogue, 3rd century

78

79

"The gates mentioned in this passage refer to the supernal grades by and through which alone a knowledge of the Almighty is possible to man."
(The Zohar, Part 1)



80-82. Illustration for *Etz Hayyim* book of the Kabbalah, Galicia, 1780. National Library, Jerusalem

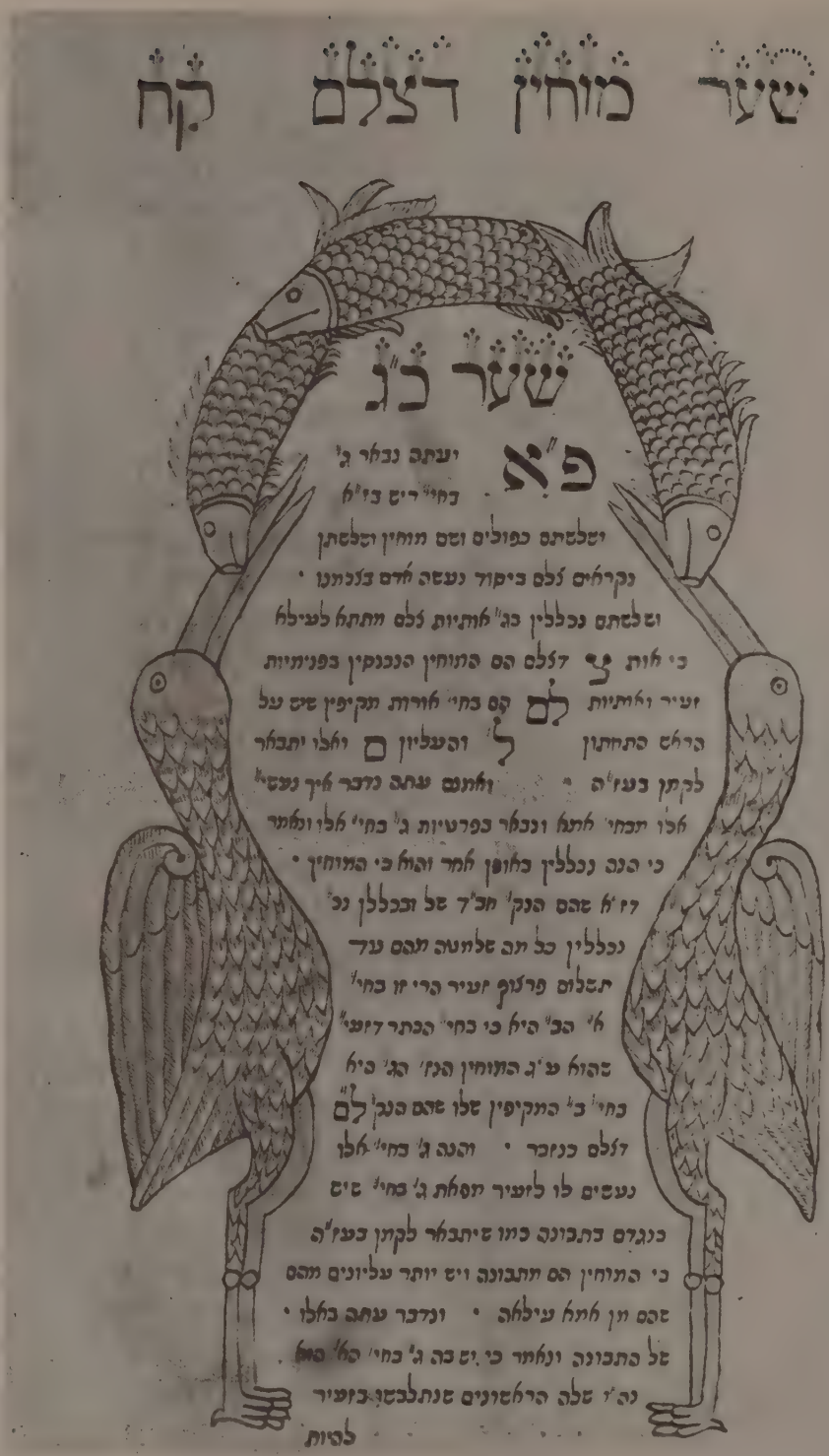
שער המוחין הקטנות

שער כ"ב

פ"א

בג' ענייני מוחין דקטנות
דע כי האדם נוצר כ
בלשון חלפים וכנשרי יחוש חלפו
ומנם דוגמת חלים שהוא טפה אחת
ביולדת ונטפת החלב וכנוס בבטן
החשם שם נתהוו ונעשו לזרוע ובכור
כיתרון ענין ג' ימים לקליטות הזרע וענין
מ' יום של יצירת הולד וענין היותו בן ג' חדשים
היכר העובר • אחנם עתה נדבר אחר בוער העיבור
לבוגרי והגדולין שלו וכן אח"כ כשהולד וכן ל
אח"כ כשנגדל וג' ימנים אלו הם שאנו
קורין תומיד עיבור ויניקה ומוחין והנה
על האחת שאנו רואין שהקטן אינו בן דעת שלו
ומוח אטום כשכלו וענב"י אנו רואין בעינינו ב
שיש לו מוחין מוחין מאד בתו הגדול וא"כ
מה ענין זה ואחנם כבר כיתרנו ענין זה כי
הקטן הוא בלא חלקים ועל"ש
והסוד הוא כי הקטן הוא
לעולם בבחי' הדין כי הלא
ל"ת נק' קטן וזעיר בעריך אבא הנקרא אבא הוא
קטן ולכן אבא הוא יותר רחמים מן הבן וכל
למעלה עתיק יומין הוא יותר רחמים מן
אבא והכלל הוא כי קוד הזקנה והשבה
בו תלוי רחמים והקטנות
הוא לאכזריות וזה נראה
בחוש

"As the fishes in the sea are covered by water, and the evil eye has no power over them..." (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 20)



In Jewish tradition, fish symbolize fertility and protection against the evil powers. In pl. 82, this symbol blends in with others related to the gateway and storks. The fish on either side of the gate (pl. 83) protect the entrance to the house. Alongside them are shapes which incorporate the *Hamsa*, the *menorah* and the Tree of Life.

83. Entrance to Jewish home at Hara Kebira, Djerba, North Africa

84

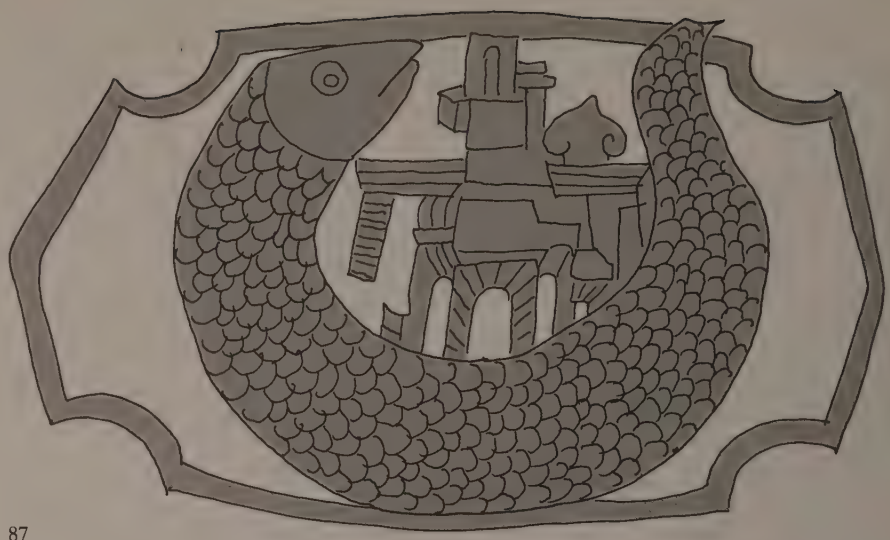
85

The reclining bull is a prominent motif in the ceiling decoration of the Gwozdziec synagogue (pl. 84, 86). So too is the leviathan, whose body encircles the city (the Heavenly Jerusalem) painted in a central and conspicuous position (pl. 87, 89). Both of these bear messianic meanings based on the legend about the righteous men in the Garden of Eden eating of the leviathan and the legendary bull.

84-85. Drawing of details from plate 86
86. Section of ceiling painting at wooden synagogue, Gwozdziec, Poland, 17th century

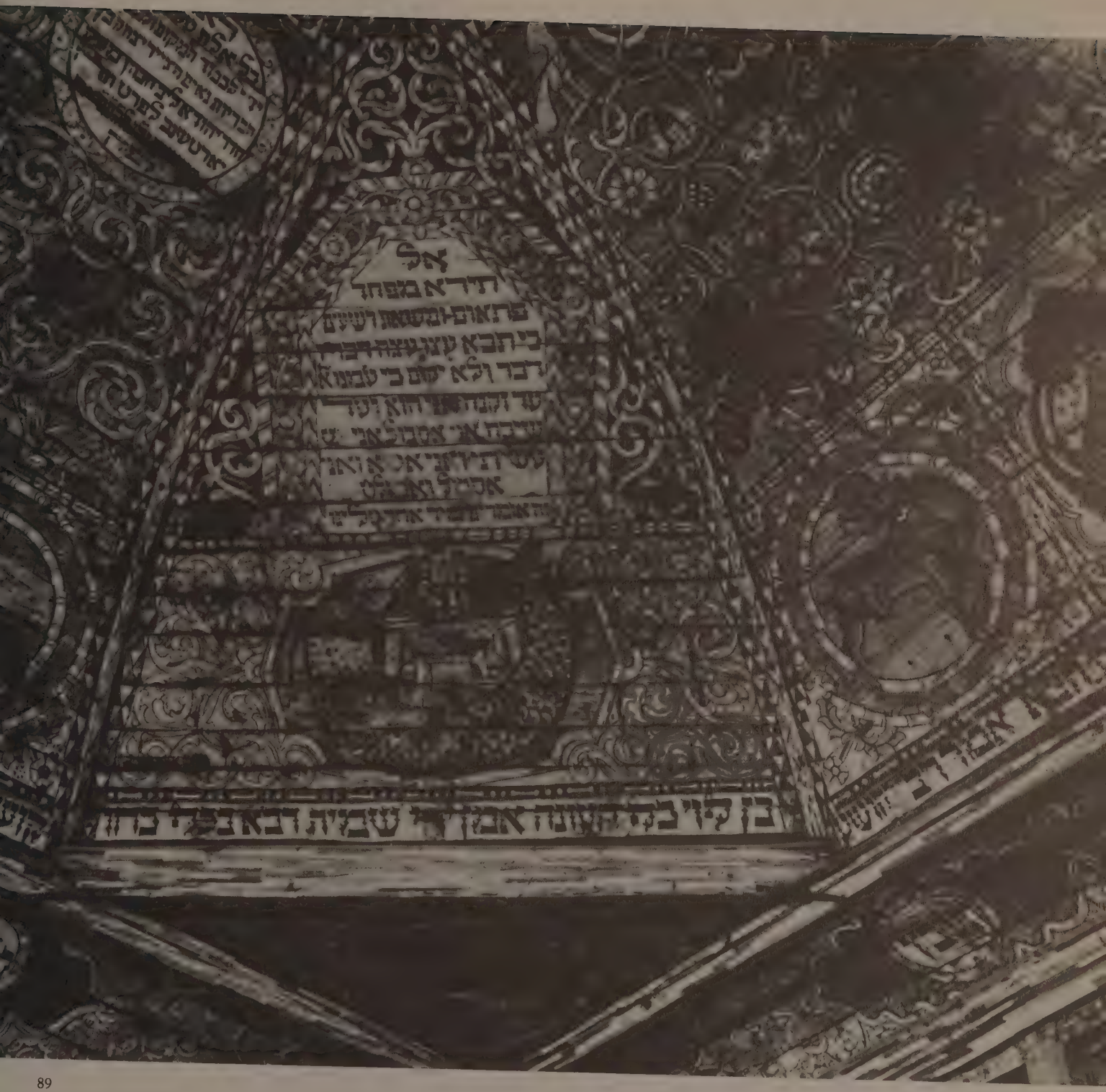
The initial impression is one of similarity between the wall painting at Mohilev (pl. 90) and the detail from the ceiling at Gwozdziec (pl. 89, 87). However, closer inspection of pl. 90 reveals the word *Worms* alongside the painting of the city which appears to be the Heavenly Jerusalem. The city of Worms was a center of religious learning and was dubbed the "Jerusalem of Europe" during the Middle Ages. It was eventually destroyed and the Jewish cultural center vanished with it. The animal at the foot of the city, moreover, is closer to a crocodile than to a leviathan. The crocodile with its sharp tongue emitting fire and swords is mentioned in the Book of *Zohar* as symbols of evil and annihilation. The cumulative effect of the many different associations reveals a profound symbolism, abounding in contradictions. The Tree of Life on the right stands for the Garden of Eden and the coming of redemption.

87-88. Drawing of details from plate 89
89. Section of ceiling painting at wooden synagogue, Gwozdziec, Poland, 17th century



87

88



"Just as this palm tree is beautiful in appearance and its fruit is sweet and good, so too is the Son of David beautiful in appearance and all that he does is sweet and good in the eyes of the Holy One Blessed be He." (*Midrash Shocher Tov, Psalms 92*)

90

91

90. Wall painting at wooden synagogue, Mohilev, Russia, 18th century
91. Drawing based on a Hebrew manuscript from France, 13th century
92. Floor mosaic, Hammam-Lif synagogue, North Africa, 5th century

92

93

Jewish art used various means of underlining the centrality of the Torah. Sometimes, it is portrayed as an open ark, symbolizing the study of Torah, upon which life in this world and the world to come depend. This accounts for the fact that such portrayals were often found in Jewish burial sites in both ancient times (pl. 94) and modern times (pl. 93). The lion and *menorahs* near the ark link it to the concept of national redemption.

93. Tombstones at Jewish cemetery at Zydowice, Poland
94. Gold-decorated glass found at Jewish burial site, Italy, 4th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

94

95

The lions are a multifaceted symbol, associated with the Messiah, a scion of the House of David. They often appeared in Jewish art on either side of the Tree of Life (pl. 100, 101). The tree is sometimes also a *menorah* (pl. 95, 99). In many instances, the lions are shown carrying the crown (pl. 97, 98, 100, 103, 105, 107) which symbolizes nearness with Infinity. The crowned figures of the lions standing over the gateway (pl. 104) can symbolize both earthly and celestial kingship.

95. Tombstone at Jewish cemetery, Koussov, Ukraine
96. Detail from plate 97
97. Torah crown, Poland 1815. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

96

97

98

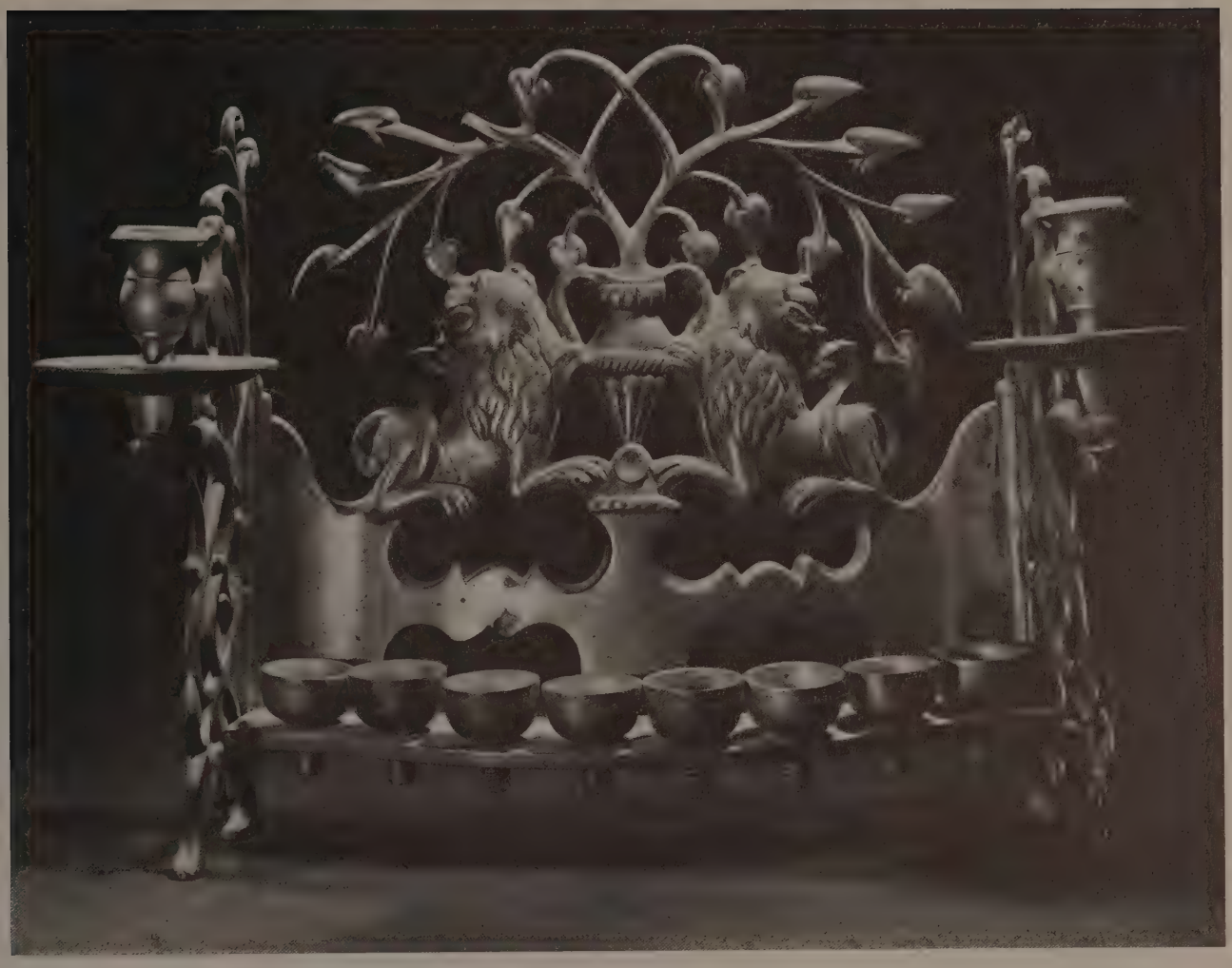
98. *Mizraḥ*, paper cut, Poland, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
99. *Mizraḥ*, paper cut, Jassy, Romania, 1846. Museum of Art, Ein Harod

יהודה
זאת המנורה נעשית פה יאם הבירה בשנת תרד כפק

"Judah is the lion's whelp, the Messiah, Son of David, who is descended from two tribes. His father is of Judah and his mother is of Dan and both are called lions." (*Yalkut Shimoni, Genesis 160*)

100

100. Hanukkah *menorah*, Poland, 18th century, Israel Museum, Jerusalem
101. Hanukkah *menorah*, Eastern Europe, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem



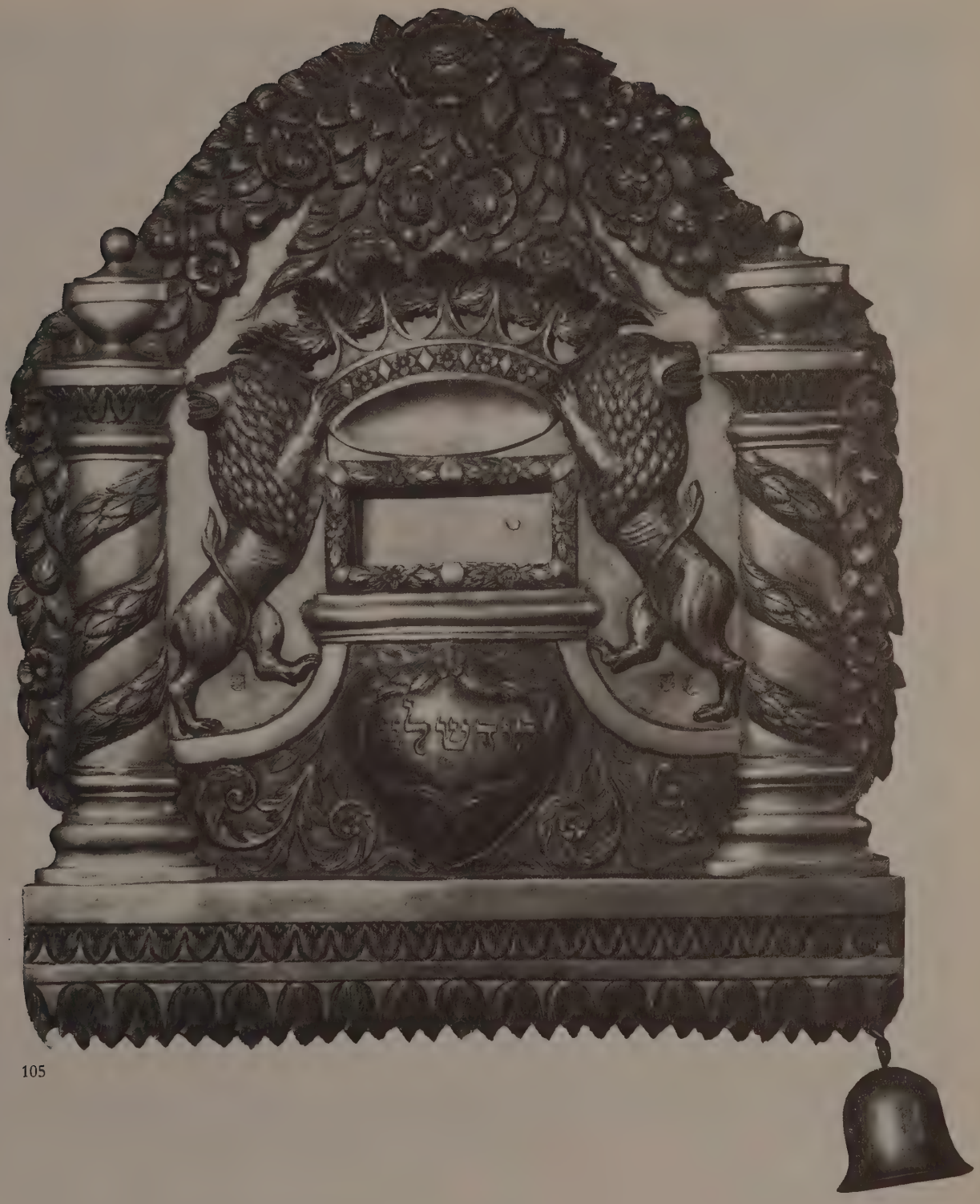
101

"Daniel was rescued from the lions because he prayed to the Almighty who is called Lion and he is of the tribe of Judah which is called Lion, so that a lion will come to rescue a lion from the mouth of a lion."
(Numbers Rabbah 13, 10)

102. Curtain for holy ark, Germany, 1725. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
103. Torah breastplate, Germany, late 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

"When God created the world, He made the heavens of fire and water mingled together but not compact, and afterwards they were made compact and firm by a divine spirit. From there God planted forth the world to rest upon supports, which themselves are kept up only by that spirit. When that spirit departs they all quiver and shake and the world trembles as it is written, 'Who shaketh the earth out of her place and the pillars thereof tremble'." (Job 9:6)
"The whole is based upon the Torah. Thus, when Israel devotes itself to the Torah, the world is firmly established and they are secure and the supports are firmly fixed in their places."
(The Zohar, Part 1)

104. Illustration to *Etz Hayyim* book of the Kabbalah, Galicia, 1780. National Library, Jerusalem
105. Torah breastplate, Germany, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem



105

"And I saw one crown different from all of the other crowns, and in it were fixed the sun and moon and twelve constellations. I said to it: 'This extraordinary crown, who is it for?' and I replied: 'For David King of Israel.'"
(Numbers Rabbah 5)

"The crown of priesthood was taken by Aaron, the crown of kingship was taken by David, the crown of Torah remains for all generations to come."
(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7)

106

106. Torah crown, Poland, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
107. Torah crown, Poland, 1807. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

107

108

The printers' marks show a clear tendency towards representing contemporary themes with such traditional symbols as the fish, the deer, the palm, the Temple and the lion. In pl. 108 for example, the deer represents the name of the founder of that particular printers association. The sign of Pisces represents the date of his birth.

108. Printer's mark of Zvi ben Avraham Kalonymus Joffe, Lublin, 17th century
109. Hanukkah *menorah*, Bohemia, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

109

110

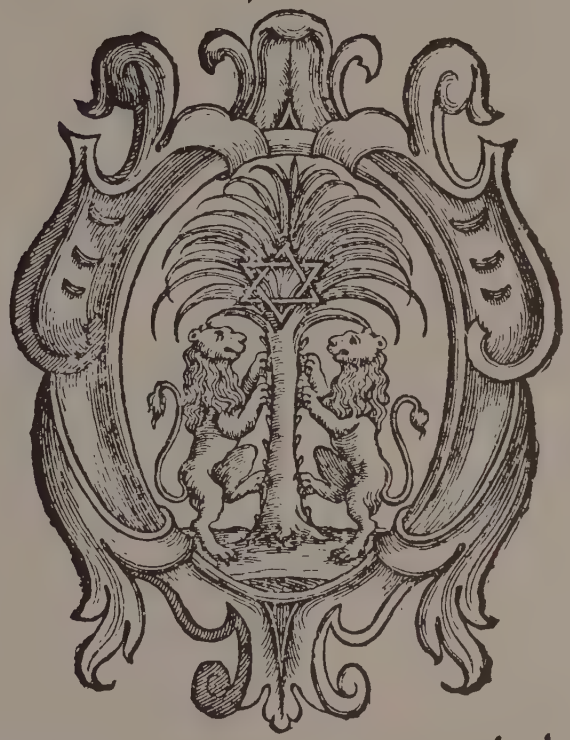
The Hebrew printers' marks helped to spread the symbols and probably also influenced the development of Jewish visual symbols in modern times.

110. Imaginary drawing of Temple. Appeared in several editions of Hebrew books
111. Printer's mark of S. ha-Cohen and M. ha-Cohen, Prague, 1593-1597
112. Printer's mark of the Foa Family, Venice, 18th century

111

צדיק

כתמר יפרח



דנל לאותות בית אב המדפים

112

113

114

It is in the printers' marks that the Star of David first appeared as a central Jewish symbol (pl. 112, 114). The Star of David also frequently appeared on amulets for magical uses (pl. 115).

113. Printer's mark of Giorgio di Cavalo, Venice, 16th century
114. Hebrew printers' mark, Prague, 1512
115. Amulet for protecting woman at childbirth, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

כה תברכו את בני ישראל אמור להם
יברכך ש וישמרך יאר ש פניו אליך ויחנך
ישא ש פניו אליך וישם לך שלום
אדם וחוה
חוה ואדם
אגלא
בשם
ארנמן
מצפין
חוץ לילית
לילית חוץ
שדי
מכשפה
לא תחיה
סיני סנסיני
קשת
לא תחיה
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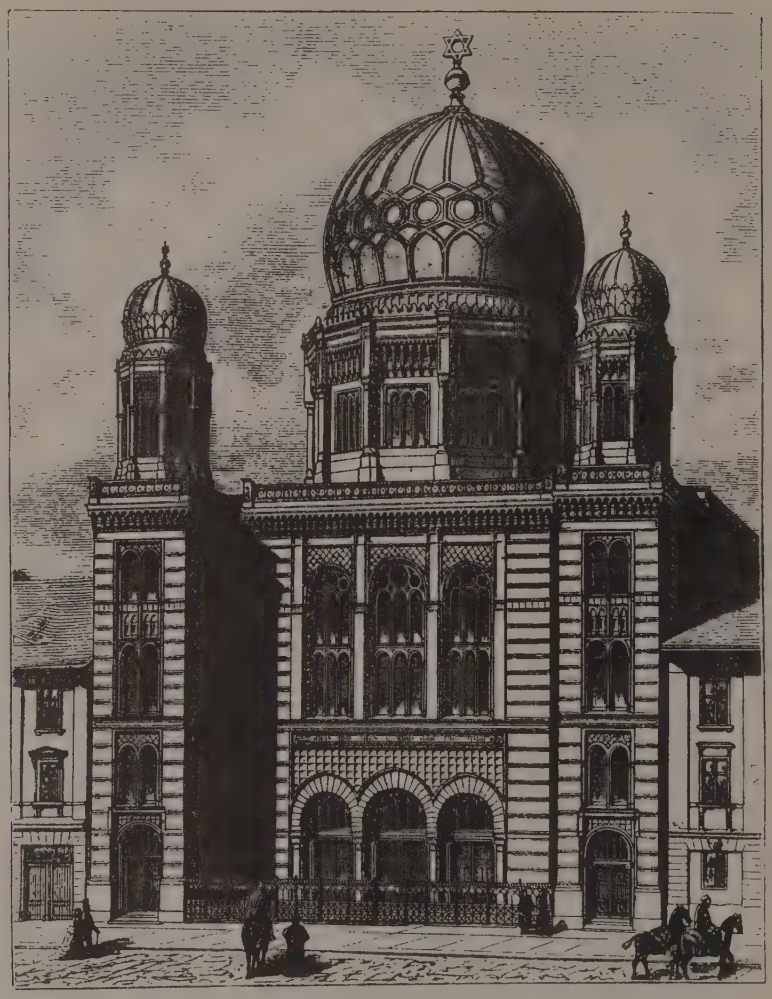
גבורים
חתים
תחיה
מכשפה לא
סנדלפון



116

It was in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries that the Star of David reached the peak of its popularity as a Jewish symbol. It was used in prominent parts of synagogue facades and roofs (pl. 116, 117). Its central position in the new synagogues of the 19th century led to its use as a general symbol of Judaism, recognizable to the non-Jewish community as well.

116. Synagogue, Berlin, 19th century
117. Proposed design for Regensburg synagogue, early 20th century

118

The Star of David shape was especially popular among those who embellished Jewish ritual objects in the Moslem countries. The Star of David in pl. 119, 120 is an organic part of the traditional decoration based on circles, rosettes and the star.

By contrast, the Star of David on the Hanukkah *menorah* from Holland (pl. 118) appears foreign to the composition and may have been superimposed after the *menorah* had been completed.

118. Hanukkah *menorah*, Holland, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
119. Torah breastplate, Turkey, 20th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

120

120. Hanukkah *menorah*, Morocco, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
121. Hanukkah *menorah*, Morocco, 18th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

121

122

123

A Star of David on the front page of *Die Welt*, founded by Herzl (pl. 124). Apart from some minor graphic changes, the star retained its position when the paper became the organ of the Zionist movement (pl. 125).

122. Torah breastplate, Turkey, 1915. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
123. Hanukkah *menorah*, India, 19th century. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
124. Nameplate of the "Die Welt" newspaper, founded by Herzl in 1897
125. Nameplate of the "Die Welt" newspaper which became the organ of the Zionist movement, 1907

Die Welt.

Redaction
und Administration:
Wien
II., Rembrandtstraße 11.

Preise der Anzeigen:
Die viermal gespaltene Petitzeile 10 kr.

Nr. 3. I. Jahrgang.

Erscheint jeden Freitag.

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124

DIE WELT

KÖLN AM RHEIN, UBIERRING 23 ERSCHEINT JEDEN FREITAG

ZENTRALORGAN DER ZIONISTISCHEN BEWEGUNG

XI. JAHRG. KÖLN, 18. Oktober 1907 י" חשון א'תחלט לחורבן No. 42.

125

126

The Jewish painter Lilien often included the symbol of the Star of David in his graphic works (pl. 126, 127, 128, 129). Some of the bookplates by Lilien incorporate the Star of David in romantic and symbolic depictions of the Holy Land.

126. Bookplate (ex-libris) created by E.M. Lilien for the Jüedischer Verlag, Berlin. Tel Aviv Museum
127. Bookplate created by E.M. Lilien. Tel Aviv Museum
128. Bookplate of painter E.M. Lilien. Tel Aviv Museum

127

128

129

The enemies of the Jewish people used the Star of David as a stigma or an object of derision (pl. 130, 131) — which only served to highlight the significance of this symbol and to add another emotional dimension.

129. Bookplate of Martin Buber created by E.M. Lilien. Tel Aviv Museum
130. Emblem of the Arab "Liberation Army"
131. Survivors of the Nazi extermination camps on their way to Palestine

130

131

132

132. Entrance doors of the Bezalel National Museum, 1925. Artists' Association, Jerusalem
133. Jewish National Fund Golden Book, 1913, created by Meir Gur-Arieh, a Bezalel artist. Jewish National Fund collection, Jerusalem

קרן קמה לישראל
ספר תורה

134

135

136

137

The decorations at the Essen synagogue exemplify the revival of traditional symbols at the beginning of the twentieth century. A very large number of symbols were made following the surge of interest in archaeological ruins and the influences of the new national movement (pl. 134-143). Some of them served as a basis for mosaics and some for bronze reliefs and stained glass windows.

134-143. Drafts for the mosaics of the synagogue at Essen, Germany, 1913

138

139

140

141

142

143

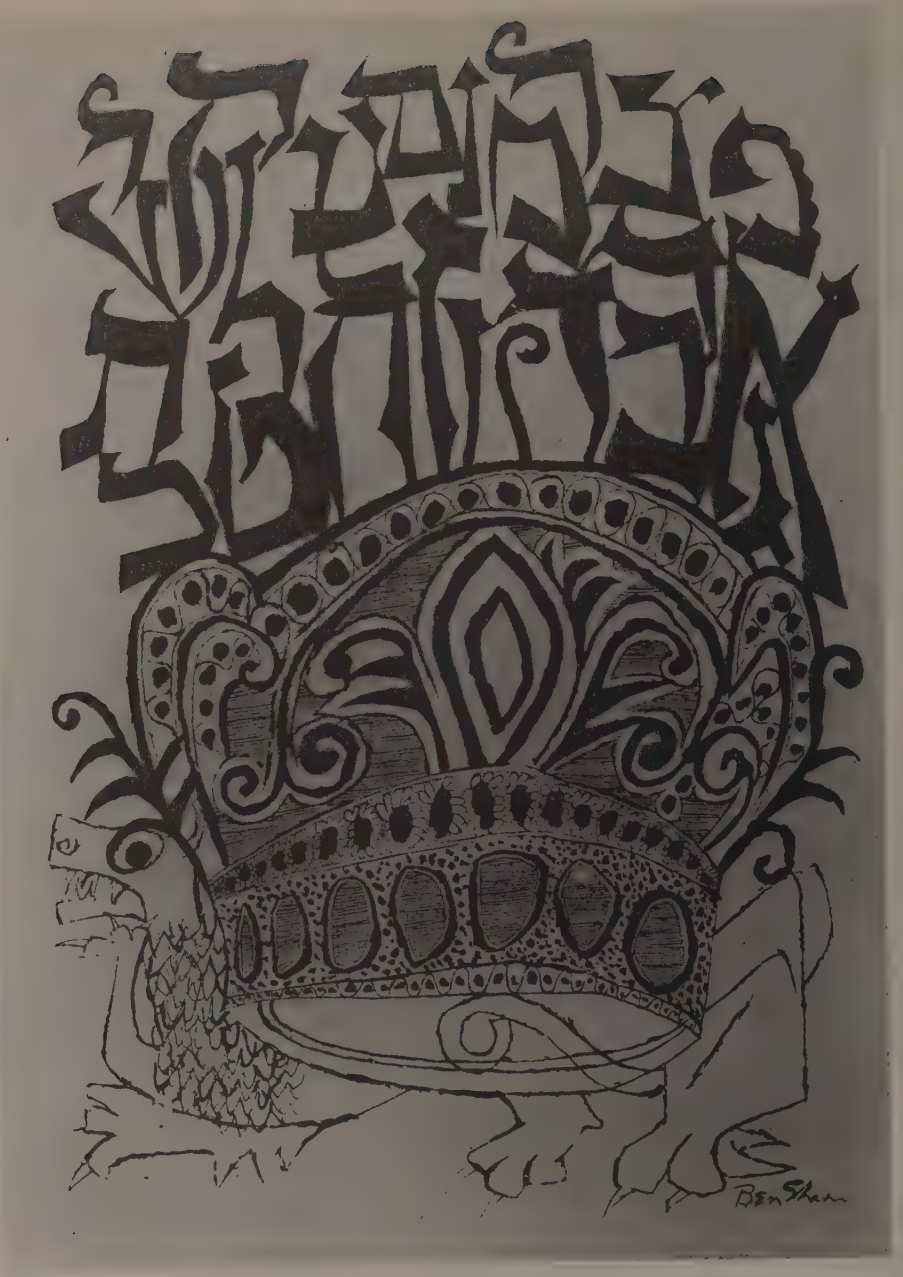
"When He came to create the world, all the letters presented themselves before Him in reversed order... the Samekh *appeared and said: O Lord of the world, may it please Thee to create through me the world, inasmuch as I represent upholding* (Semikhah) *of the fallen... the Lord answered her: This is just the reason why Thou shouldst remain in Thy place, for shouldst Thou leave it, what will be the fate of the fallen. The* Nun *entered and pleaded her merits... The Lord said: O* Nun, *return to Thy place, for it is for Thy sake that the* Samekh *returned to her place. Remain, therefore, under her support. The* Nun *immediately returned to her place..."*
(The Zohar, Part 1)

144

The Hebrew letters are a widespread motif in the works of many modern painters. The Kabbalistic fable tells of the role the Hebrew letters played in the Creation. It was a source of inspiration to Israeli artist Mordechai Ardon (pl. 144, 145). Pl. 145 is from a series of lithographs on the subject. It depicts the Hebrew letter *bet*, which was accorded a leading role in the act of Creation. (The Book of Genesis begins with the Hebrew letter *bet*.)

144. Lithograph in the *The Creation* series by Mordechai Ardon, detail, 1981. Bineth Gallery, Tel Aviv
145. Lithograph in the *The Creation* series by Mordechai Ardon, 1981. Bineth Gallery, Tel Aviv

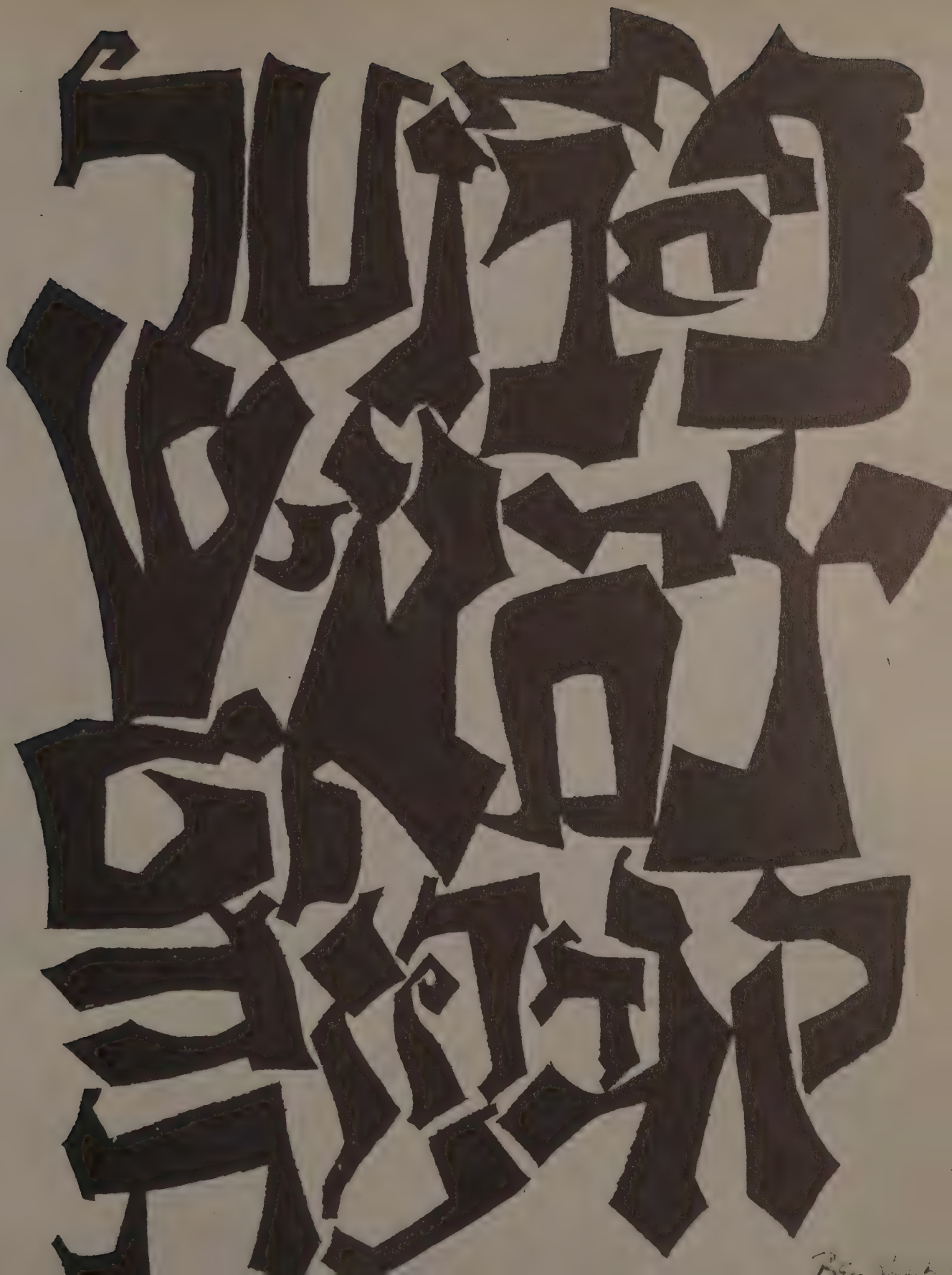
145



146

This same fable also influenced the American Jewish artist Ben Shahn (pl. 146, 147). After pondering its theme for over ten years he was to come up with a new version of the Alphabet of Creation, which introduced the symbolism of the Holocaust and of the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt.

146. *Alphabet*, drawing by Ben Shahn, 1954
147. *The Alphabet of Creation*, silk-screen, by Ben Shahn, 1957. Israel Museum, Jerusalem



148

The alphabet is a central motif in many of the works of Israeli artist M. Castel. It is an imaginary script, inspired by the ancient Mediterranean civilizations symbolizing the affinity of the Jewish people to this region (pl. 148). The actual technique, based on the use of ground basalt, also contributes to the symbolism.

The paintings of N. Bezem use such motifs as the ladder, the fish, the lion, the tree, the ram's horn and the candles. These are the symbols of Jewish survival in the diaspora, of the Holocaust and of the national rebirth in the Land of Israel (pl. 149, 156).

148. *Scrolls of Canaan*, part of a triptych by Moshe Castel, 1964. Tel Aviv Museum
149. *New Immigrant Kissing the Earth*, oil painting by Naftali Bezem, 1970. Tel Aviv Museum

149

150

The sculpture "David and Goliath" by Jacques Lipchitz stands for the artist's hope that the Jewish people will overcome the Nazi threat (pl. 152). In other cases Lipchitz expresses a similar idea using mythological figures: Prometheus, created as a bronze sketch in 1931 depicts the hero as tortured and helpless (pl. 150). In 1936, however, Lipchitz changed his approach and depicted Prometheus battling for his life and appearing to vanquish the eagle which was attacking him. This was symbolic of the artist's hope that the powers of light would overcome the powers of darkness (pl. 151).

150. *Prometheus*, sketch in bronze by Jacques Lipchitz, 1931. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
151. *Prometheus*, sketch in bronze by Jacques Lipchitz, 1936. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
152. *David and Goliath*, sketch in bronze by Jacques Lipchitz, 1933. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

151

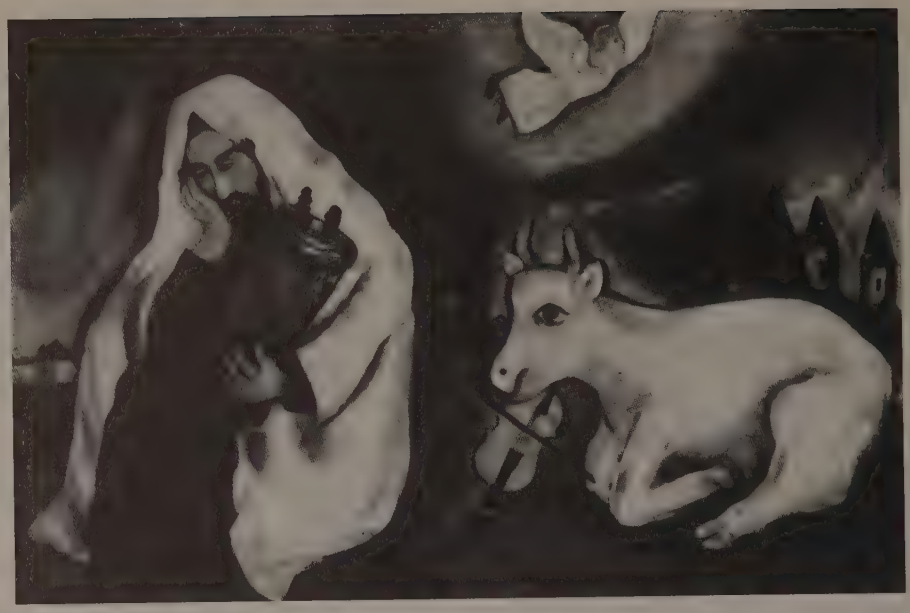
"When God decided to create the world, He first produced a flame of a scintillating lamp. He blew spark against spark, causing darkness and fire, and produced from the recesses of the abyss a certain drop which He joined with the flame, and from the two He created the world. The flame ascended and encircled itself with the Left and the drop ascended and encircled itself with the Right. They then crossed and changed places going up and down alternately until they were closely interlocked and there issued from between them a full wind. Then those two sides were made one."
(The Zohar, Part 1)

153

The work of Yaakov Agam is influenced by the Jewish sources on which the artist was raised. For him, abstraction and movement are the quintessence of Jewish thought. His work "Fire and Water" is influenced by cosmic imagery taken from the Kabbalah and representing the act of Creation (pl. 153).

153. *Fire and Water*, moving sculpture by Yaakov Agam, 1972. From the artist's collection
154. *Transformation and Fusion*, silk-screen, by Yaakov Agam, 1970. Israel Museum, Jerusalem

154

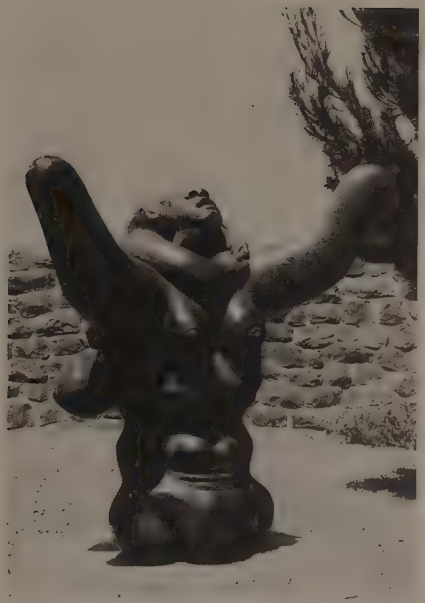


155

The works of Chagall are steeped in symbols and allusions taken from Jewish life and culture — the struggle for survival, the dreams and the hopes (pl. 155). At times his work takes on provocative keenness including sacred symbols of Christian and Jewish tradition which add controversal meanings. In several of his paintings, the Crucifixion theme appears as a symbol of Jewish suffering, and the crucified figure is wrapped in a prayer shawl (pl. 159).

156

155. *Solitude* by Marc Chagall, oil on canvas. 1933. Tel Aviv Museum
156. *Long-Suffering Fish,* Lithography by Naftali Bezem, Tel Aviv Museum
157. *The Mother*, a sculpture in bronze by Jacques Lipchitz, 1941-42. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
158. Detail from *The Mother*, sculpture by Jacques Lipchitz, 1941-1942. Israel Museum, Jerusalem
159. *The White Crucifixion* by Marc Chagall, oil on canvas, 1938. The Art Institute of Chicago (next page)



157

158

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